The Ludwig Chronicles

By: Diala G

Ludwig Von Koopa lives a quiet life on Glass Island with his mother, having lost his father to a tragic accident the year before. Little does he know that this quiet life is in jeopardy, and a lot is resting on his shoulders if Koopas as a species are to survive. A fan-made origin story.

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Prologue

Prologue

A violent storm raged across Glass Island, whipping up the surrounding sea and creating huge surges that battered the coast. Nestled atop a cliff, situated on the outskirts of Astrowatch, the islands main town, a small stone cottage stood. Inside this cottage, Edith Von Koopa cradled her son, Ludwig, in her arms. He was only a few weeks old, but she already loved him more than anything else in the world. The wind and rain had woken him from his slumber and frightened him, but as soon as his mother had lifted him up, he had calmed and now stared up at her with his inquisitive grey eyes.

Edith was of relatively short stature and had long, navy blue hair which reached her waist with her shell off. She was slim, had hazel eyes and a blue and green spiked shell. She sung as she cradled Ludwig in a wonderful soft voice to try and drown out the noise of the wind and rain which lashed the walls and widows.

She wandered over to the library at the back of the house and stared out of the window at the bleak world beyond it. Through the rain she could see the lights of Astrowatch, and beyond that, a grey patch of sky that was continually lit up by multicoloured flashes of light. She shuddered as she watched them break across the sky, each one signalling a possible victory, or defeat. Despite the seeming tranquillity of the town, a battle raged on in the distance between Silas and the Orphan King, and if the king lost, if *they* lost… Edith did not want to think about what would happen to them if that was the case.

The battle continued for what seemed like hours, although in reality only minutes had passed. Edith watched with bated breath, she *had* to know the outcome.

Although it felt like forever, she did not have to wait long, for a warm orange glow appeared on the horizon, lingered for a few minutes, and exploded, bathing everything in white for less than a second,

before vanishing altogether. The sky became dormant, and the storm receded.

She paced back and forth through the library, eventually deciding to sit in front of the grand piano. Lifting the fallboard, she played a few notes to try and soothe her nerves. The battle was over and she now had to wait and see who the victor was, however, if it were Silas, she and her son would most likely have been killed by now. Still, it was never wise to jump to conclusions.

Ludwig gurgled, blissfully unaware of the seriousness that surrounded him. He hit some of the keys with his pudgy hands, squealing in delight at the sounds they made. His happiness snapped Edith out of her trance and she beamed down at him. Perhaps he would grow up to be a famous musician?

A knock at the door made her jolt upright. She quickly ran over to it. If it were Silas, he would not have been so polite as to knock, he probably would have blasted the door clean off of its hinges. She undid the latch and opened the door to quite a sight. A group of a dozen Koopas stood before her, some battered and bruised, others bleeding and all very bedraggled from the earlier rain. She didn't know the names of all of them but she recognised Verne Koopa, the mayor of the island, her husband's two friends: Quinn and Daniel, who were supporting…

"Johann!", she cried upon seeing her husband, warm relief flooding over her in a great wave. The troop moved inside their home, tracking mud everywhere, but at that moment, Edith couldn't have cared less. Carpets and rugs could be replaced, but not her husband.

Quinn and Daniel deposited him on the sofa in their lounge and Edith assessed the damage. His fluffy green-blue hair was matted with dried blood and across his cheek was a long, but thankfully not too deep gash that would only scar lightly. "Vhat happened to him", she questioned the group in her Germanic voice, as Johann appeared to be completely unconscious. They shuffled uncomfortably under her gaze, with no one looking as if they wanted to answer her. Eventually, Verne stepped forward.

"Mrs Von Koopa" he said gently, "we have won, for now. The Orphan King managed to force Silas into a retreat, despite the odds that were placed against him. But this victory has come with its drawbacks, as you can see." He paused for a moment. "I'm sorry to tell you that Johann was hit by a very strong memory loss curse".

The statement struck Edith like a rock being thrown against a pane of glass. She dropped into an armchair, clutching Ludwig tightly. The whole world seemed to be moving very quickly. "So - you're telling me he von't remember me – *or* our son?".

"It's not as bad as it sounds", Quinn interjected, glaring at Verne and his blunt wording. "Johann hasn't forgotten you. Kamek, the King's guardian, managed to counteract most of the spells effects, however, he warned us that Johann may still become forgetful as he ages." He fumbled around in his jacket pocket and produced a small glass bottle that contained a shimmering purple liquid. "Kamek said to make sure that Johann takes this potion when he wakes up. It's a restoration potion that will help his memory further".

Edith, although still shaken, felt greatly relieved by this knowledge and thanked the group, who departed shortly afterwards to go home to their own families, who would all be anxious to learn of the nights events. Once they had left, Edith put Ludwig, who had fallen asleep in her arms, back to bed and then returned to the lounge to watch over Johann. It was just before sunrise when he awakened.

"Edith", he whispered in a hoarse voice "Vhat happened? I remember Silas being right in front of me and then – my mind became - foggy" he raised a hand and placed it on his temple.

She recounted to him everything that she had been told. Johann frowned, "I am sorry for vorrying you" he said.

"You don't need to apologise! You're alive and you're home, that's vhat matters most". She hugged him fiercely and they watched the sunrise together, vowing that, no matter what the future held, they would protect Ludwig at all costs, so that he could have a happy, peaceful life.

The Return and The Visitor

Chapter One

Nine years later.

Ludwig awoke to a sunny morning and clambered out of his bed, his stubby little legs straining to reach the ground. Upon reaching the floor, he went about his morning rituals: making his bed, washing his face, parting and combing his hair, the last of which always took him a while to complete, as his hair was always horribly tangled first thing in the morning. Upon completing these, he made his way downstairs, pausing to say good morning to a picture of his father that he kept on his bedside table.

"Good Morning, Luddy!", his mother exclaimed as he arrived in the kitchen. "Did you sleep vell?"

"Yes, thank you" he replied in his polite tone, beaming. His mother was his world, wherever she went she exuded happiness. He hugged her and she ruffled his fluffy blue hair. "My little prince", she murmured. Ever since his father had been killed in a freak accident just over a year ago, Ludwig and his mother had relied on themselves to keep the other going. Ludwig still struggled with nightmares over what had happened that day, which was still fresh in his mind.

His mother styled his hair for him in its signature Beethoven style, humming to herself as she did so. Music had always been an important part of his family and Ludwig could not picture a world without it. He was described as a prodigy by his teachers, coming top in all of his classes and excelling in music. At only nine years old he had already mastered the piano and had even begun composing his own symphonies as an outlet for the grief and guilt that his father's death had caused. He also had an excellent singing voice, but this was hardly ever heard by anyone save his mother or himself, as Ludwig was a painfully shy young Koopa. At school he had no friends and spent most of his time poring over books and

homework as a way to avoid others. His father's death had led to him isolating himself further in the past few months than he did already, and his mother was beginning to worry about him, for the moment however, she let him be. 'We all feel grief in different ways', was her reasoning.

As soon as she had finished styling his hair, Ludwig ate his breakfast, which was pancakes, one of his favourites. He cleared his plate away and went back upstairs to make sure his schoolbag was ready. He had packed it the night before but he always liked to choose a couple of extra books to put in for extra reading, what he chose depended on his mood. Today, he felt scientific and therefore opted to bring with him ' *A Beginners Guide to Airship Architecture* ' and ' *A Koopa's History of Science* ', both of which fascinated him. Ludwig aspired to one day create his own airship, being able to take to the skies whenever he wished seemed an amazing thing to be able to do, as well as this, he also aspired to be an inventor, a scientist and a musician, all of which he was more than capable of.

His ability to learn was noticed the moment he began school, at only four years old. He would always finish his schoolwork well before any of his classmates and was always at the top of the class. His teachers gave him extra tasks which he eagerly worked through but appeared to find unchallenging, thus it was decided when Ludwig was seven that he would be transferred to the senior school and begin lessons there. He was currently in his second year there and was still at the top of all his classes, winning many awards throughout the year, including a full sweep of the core subject awards: Maths, English, Biology, Chemistry and Physics, at the annual prizegiving, which was held at the end of the year. This had led a great deal of his classmates to shun him out of jealousy, but Ludwig did not mind this at all due to his shyness and lack of self-confidence.

He finished packing his books and lifted his rucksack, which now felt like it contained a pile of bricks, onto his back. He managed to balance it on the spike of his shell, for the moment he only had a single spike, but more would grow in as he got older. He glanced again at the photograph of Johann on the way out, but the memories of his death came flooding back, each and every one reminding

Ludwig that, had he not asked his father to take him fishing, he wouldn't have drowned when the boat capsized and knocked him unconscious. He had tried to drag him back to shore, but a huge wave had crashed into him, causing Ludwig to lose his grip and watch as his father was dragged back out into the lake.

He shook his head, breaking free of the trance he had entered. "Think good thoughts", his mother had told him "and everything will be alright". Ludwig closed his eyes and focused on all of the good memories he had of his father, but the sharp sting of tears caused him to abandon ship and hurry downstairs, blinking them back before he got to the kitchen to say goodbye to his mother. He had to be strong, for her sake.

She handed him his lunch bag at the door and gave him a light kiss on the cheek. "Have a good day Luddy, my little prince" she said, wrapping him in a warm embrace "and remember, you can always leave the lesson if everything gets too overwhelming". He nodded, holding on to her tightly, afraid to let her go.

Edith watched him waddle up the garden path, before retreating back indoors. She had been worried of late. Things were happening all over the island that could not be explained. Three days ago, a couple of residents had vanished into thin air and just a few days before that, a huge wave had appeared out of nowhere and crashed upon the shores of a well- known beach. Four Koopas were still unaccounted for.

"Edith."

She whipped around and saw Verne standing in the doorway, a look of exhaustion and pure terror on his face.

"Vhat is it?" she questioned, alarm beginning to creep in. *What had happened now?*

"You need to come to Silverlake – now – there's been an incident".

Glass Island was named for the crystal-clear waters that surrounded

it, which, on sunny days, reflected light on its pale blue cliffs, making it appear that the island itself was made of glass, like one huge multicoloured kaleidoscope.

The journey to Ludwig's school was a particularly pleasant one. It took him along the north coast of the island, where he could gaze out at the huge expanse of glittering waters that lay beyond the shore. He attended Pine Grove, the only school on the island. It was an exceedingly small school that catered to only a couple of hundred children, due to the population of Glass Island being rather small. All permanent residents of Glass Island were Koopas, the dominant species. The only time Ludwig had interacted with another species had been three years ago when a ship had docked at Starlight Cove, the islands main port. It was a ship containing a mixture of Shy Guys and Goombas who had come to trade goods with the island. Ludwig had been afraid of the Goombas, they were very loud and always appeared to be angry from what Ludwig could ascertain, not being able to speak any Goomba himself. Predominantly, he spoke English and German. His father had conversed with a group of Shy Guys, something that had surprised Ludwig. He was amazed by the certainty of his father's speech, he had no idea his father could speak Shy Guy fluently, but he talked as if they were good friends. Ludwig had never asked how he came to learn the language, but it had interested him ever since.

Pine Grove School was a stately building that had been very well maintained, it was divided into four 'wings' and had a large courtyard strewn with trees in the centre, where the students could go during break to get some fresh air. Ludwig headed to 'East Wing', where his form room was located and sat down at the front of the class, pulling out his mechanical engineering book as he did so. As any student or teacher would tell you, when it came to school, Ludwig Von Koopa was first in and last out, such was his passion for learning. He always enjoyed going into school early as it gave him the chance to do some quiet reading before his rowdy classmates arrived. Unfortunately, today he was not alone.

"Hullo, Toothwig."

Ludwig did not turn around but he knew who was speaking. Elliot Koopa had thus far made his senior school life a misery. He made

fun of Ludwig every chance he got when the teachers had their backs turned. It had all started during one of his first lessons as a senior student. They had both been in a music lesson together and the teacher had suggested that they all experiment with an instrument they had not played before. Ludwig decided he would try and play a clarinet, as he had never used a woodwind instrument before but thought that they sounded delightful. Unfortunately, his overbite meant that he couldn't blow into the instrument properly as his large front tooth got in the way. Half of the class had laughed at him, led by Elliot, who had chanted "Toothwig" at him, a name which had since stuck. Ludwig did not understand why he had to have an overbite, his parents didn't have one and he thought it all very unfair.

He didn't reply to Elliot's remark, choosing to continue his book instead. For a moment it looked like Elliot might walk over and grab the book, but a few of his friends arrived and he went off to chat with them instead. Ludwig breathed a sigh of relief.

"Vhat has happened now?" Edith questioned as she strode alongside Verne "Have there been more disappearances?"

Verne seemed to be fighting some sort of inward battle and therefore refrained from answering any of her questions. Edith tried to keep herself calm, but the silence between them led to a creeping feeling of dread.

Eventually they arrived at Silverlake, a small settlement to the south of the islands main water source, a large lake that was called 'Sunset Waters'. All of the places on Glass Island had rather whimsical names about them, which added to its magical appearance. Sometimes, Edith reflected, walking across the island was like walking through a dream.

Today, however, things were taking a nightmarish turn. Not only was Sunset Waters the site of Johann's death almost a year ago, but Silverlake itself was still, not a sound emerged from the group of houses, which were normally bustling with life.

Verne looked at her regretfully, what he had to say was clearly far

more serious than she had anticipated.

"I'm sorry for troubling you with this," he said at last "but I didn't know who else to call, Quinn and Daniel are here as well" he indicated to a large house, where two figures were standing outside, conversing. Edith walked over towards them. Both of their faces were very pale and Quinn looked like he was about to be sick.

"Vhat's happened?" she demanded, determined to find out the cause of all this distress.

Daniel looked at Verne, who nodded, and opened the door. She let out a shocked gasp. Inside the house lay four Koopas, all of them dead. Verne left her alone for a moment so she could get over the shock, before he spoke.

"There are no survivors" he said, his voice breaking and tears filling his eyes.

Edith looked at him with great sympathy, the mysterious events were weighing heavily on Verne's shoulders. Being the mayor, he had decided not to tell the rest of the island about the multiple disappearances for fear of scaring them. There was no way he could cover up the slaughter of an entire village. Edith put a hand on his shoulder "Did you manage to get in contact with Kamek, I'm sure he could tell us whether Silas has returned. He would be able to sense his magic easily".

Verne nodded, "He said he should be here soon".

As if on cue, Kamek materialised in front of them, making Edith jump.

"Sorry m'dear" he adjusted his glasses, looking rather dishevelled "teleportation has never been the easiest mode of transport for me." Once his glasses were in place, he recognised who she was "Ah, Edith…" he spoke in his deep, croaky voice "It is wonderful to see you again, I am so sorry it has to be under similar circumstances to the last time I saw you".

She tried her best to smile, the last time she had seen Kamek had

been at Johann's funeral, but she could feel the tears building up, so Kamek hastily changed the subject.

"Verne."

Verne stood to attention "Yes, sir?"

"When did you find all of these bodies?"

"This morning, I was doing the usual rounds with Quinn and Daniel to check on the residents", he explained "we have been trying to visit everyone in order to see that any disappearances are accounted for."

Kamek didn't wait to be shown in. He hobbled into the house that Edith had just peered into and assessed the four bodies.

"Hmm, that's interesting, there is no bruising at all on them and no blood either, that would certainly suggest that it was a strong magical spell that killed them…" he pulled out his wand and used magic to check for any internal injuries, but found none.

"Do you think that Silas killed them?" Edith inquired. Kamek turned to her, bemused.

"Well, there are no external or internal injuries on any of their bodies, which strongly suggests that it was magic that killed them, but it would have had to have been a powerful spell, which is even more concerning, as Silas was dangerous enough in the first place. I find it especially concerning that I cannot detect his magic trail because as a Magikoopa, I should be able to sense others magic, especially powerful magic, but I cannot on this occasion, which means that he has become powerful enough to block others from feeling his power. The only condolence I can offer is that these Koopas would not have suffered, there would have been more damage otherwise." He stared sadly at the bodies in front of him.

Verne continued speaking with Kamek, Verne and Daniel, but Edith decided that she would go outside and get some fresh air in order to gather her thoughts. As she turned to the door, something caught her eye. A small red splodge on the back of the door.

"Kamek, vould you be able to identify the culprit by his blood?" she inquired. Kamek strode over to her and only had to have a brief look at the mark before he could decipher the culprit.

"It is indeed Silas. Although I think we had that figured out anyway" he remarked. "He was injured and he used magic to wipe away any trace of him being here, but he didn't manage to complete his work, I would imagine that he heard you coming and didn't want to risk further injury, but…"

"Vhat?" Edith questioned him as he stared thoughtfully "Vhat are you thinking about?"

Kamek looked at her "Silas doesn't have the ability to teleport" he spoke calmly, "so that means he could still be here."

A loud thud came from upstairs, and the group froze. Kamek refused to be held back by fear and called out "Silas, my friend, we didn't think you were going to give us the pleasure of your company".

Edith felt herself and the others recoil at the sound of someone descending the stairs. A tall, slim Koopa with tan complexion stepped out of the shadows, he had a grey spiked shell and long, slick black hair that was pulled back into a ponytail. There was a bloodstain across his chest, but the wound appeared to have been healed with magic. He shot them a piercing glare through icy blue eyes.

"Well done," he remarked condescendingly "I thought that I had managed to cover up my trail, although it was only a matter of time before I would have made my presence known."

He grinned at Edith in a sinister manner.

"Edith Von Koopa, I wish I could say I was sorry for your husband's death, but alas, I am not. That idiot almost told you that I was back. I put a stop to that though!" He threw back his head and laughed. "Isn't it funny to think he drowned in a lake called 'Sunset Waters', that's certainly where the sun set for him!" He laughed even harder at this. Edith could feel the hot tears stinging her eyes. She had always had her suspicions about Johann's death and this had finally

confirmed them.

For a moment, Silas looked rueful. "It's just a shame I didn't manage to kill off little Ludwig as well, I was so hoping he would drown too".

"You're a monster!" Edith bellowed, lunging for him but being caught by Quinn and Daniel as she did so.

Silas paid no attention to her remark but continued talking as if she weren't even there. "I would have managed it if someone hadn't intervened" he said, shooting a hateful glance at Kamek.

"Don't look at me", the wizard replied, "I wasn't anywhere near Glass Island on that day, but I wish I had been, maybe Johann would still be alive then".

Silas snorted at this. "Don't think that your pathetic magic can stop me, old man. You and Bowser may have stopped me the first time, but I am stronger now, you won't be so lucky this time. And who *else* could have cast up the massive wave that pulled Ludwig to shore?"

Kamek shrugged. "There are *other* wizards out there you know" he said sarcastically.

"Can the sarcasm" Silas retorted.

"What do you want, Silas?" Verne demanded.

"Well, my original plan was to just dispose of Bowser by getting my hands on that book you are hiding from me, then I would be able to become King of the Koopas myself. But now, only being King of the Koopas seems a rather unimportant goal, when I can harness enough power to take over the entire world. Don't think that that means I won't destroy everyone on this island for rising up against me, though. I swore I would and I never break a promise."

"No one would ever be willing to accept you as king" Edith hissed.

Silas shrugged. "Who said they would be willing? I will make them."

Edith shuddered at his words, but Kamek remained as calm as always.

"Very well, then, I don't suppose there's much we can do to stop you at present," he sighed, "I guess we will just have to go our separate ways for now, until the aforesaid day you mentioned arrives".

Everyone, Silas included, stared at him incredulously.

"What? We are completely unarmed. What is the use of fighting such a *formidable* enemy?" Kamek questioned.

Edith could detect a hint of mockery in his tone. What was he planning?

"Farewell then, Silas, until we meet again". Kamek moved away from the door, as if he were showing him the exit.

Silas looked baffled.

"You mean, you're expecting to leave this place – *alive?* "

"I must confess I was, Silas – or should I say *Your Highness* , seeing as you already pretty much consider yourself the King?".

Silas glared at him, "Watch your tongue, old man."

Kamek sighed again. "You have much to learn my boy, much to learn".

Silas pulled out a long black wand that had on top of it a large purple stone. The stone glowed brightly, signalling how powerful it's owner was. Still Kamek appeared unmoved.

For a moment, no-one moved. Edith could hear the waves breaking on the shores of the lake and the whispers of the long grass outside, swaying in the gentle breeze. Then, all was a flurry of motion. Silas launched towards Kamek, who jumped out of the way, causing Silas to run smack into the middle of a wall, Verne grabbed hold of Edith and ran outside the building, with Daniel and Quinn in hot pursuit. Once outside, they observed the battle between the wizard and the magician. Silas shot a red blast from his wand, which Kamek deflected before grabbing his broom and taking to the sky. Silas, who had no need for a broom, simply levitated up towards him. Edith, meanwhile, was trying to figure out Kamek's plan. He would

not have provoked Silas if he had not had one.

It didn't take long for everything to become clear, though. Kamek lured Silas higher into the sky, waiting for him to come just close enough…

Silas fired again, but this time, Kamek deflected the volley and vanished into thin air, appearing right behind Silas as he was using his wand to create a barrier to deflect the ricocheting spell. In less than a second, Kamek shot a spell at his wand, cracking the stone that contained the source of his power, but not managing to entirely obliterate it, as he had evidently hoped for he now teleported again, this time back to where the others were standing. Silas let out a roar as he plummeted back to earth, falling into the lake. Kamek cracked his wrists.

"Phew!" he exhaled. "That was much harder than it used to be. An old wizard like me should really refrain from such things. But really-" he said as he watched a sopping wet, bedraggled Silas emerge from the lake "Am I to blame? The boy really had it coming. He even had the nerve to call himself a wizard. A *wizard!* A wizard would never seek to corrupt their magic as he does! The audacity of some Koopas!"

Silas glared at Kamek, at all of them, from the shores of Sunset Waters.

"Don't think that you will always win, I *will* have the upperhand next time." He turned to go, but Quinn stopped him.

"Hey, Silas!"

"What!" he bellowed across at him.

Quinn paused, looking slightly afraid at what he was about to say, but going through with it nevertheless "Don't you want a towel?" he grinned at him and Daniel snorted audibly.

Silas' glare stopped him, "I will be sure to remember those words for when we meet again, Quinn Koopa." he threatened, before using his now dysfunctional wand to summon a pipe to take him to another

kingdom.

Edith was the first to speak after he had gone. "What are we going to do? Silas always made good on his threats in the past, what if he comes back - what if – what if he kills Ludwig, or any of you?" she started to cry, unable to hold back the tears any longer. "I don't want him to hurt anyone else I love!"

Kamek put his hand on her shoulder, comfortingly. "It will all be fine, Edith. We are stronger than him, no matter how much magic he has." He smiled kindly, "Because we have love, something that Silas has never ever had, otherwise how could his magic be so evil and twisted? Bowser knows about his return and is preparing an army to face him once again." He whispered to her "And just between you and me, I found him much more manageable when he was nineteen, just remember how grumpy he was then!"

Edith managed a laugh. Whenever Kamek was around, humour was never far away, and she appreciated it very much, but she could still not shake the feeling of dread that had been building up now for so many months.

"I hate to question you, Sir", Verne always referred to Kamek as 'sir', "but why would you waste so much energy on a useless fight like that?"

Kamek tossed his head. "I'll have you know that it was *not* a useless fight. He could have killed us quite easily had I not started it, and besides-" he pulled out a small fragment of purple stone from his robe pocket "I got a piece of his wand. He can't regain full power without it".

Verne made a noise of surprise. "What are you going to do with it?" he questioned.

"I will give it to someone to look after until the time comes to defeat Silas properly", he answered.

"We need to get back to Astrowatch," Verne said, "I need to figure out how I am going to address the town about what has happened.

"I wouldn't tell them about Silas' return, that will send them into a panic." Kamek warned. "I suggest you set up a cordon around Silverlake for the time being". He looked up at the sun. It was midday, judging by its position. "I will take you back to Astrowatch. He would attack you again if he knew you were heading back without magical protection, but he wouldn't dare attack you in the town, there are too many Koopas there to stop him".

"It's alright," Edith told Verne "we will find a way to stop him. Forever this time."

Verne cast her a doubtful look as they all began to head back home.

Ludwig arrived home at around 4:30. It was a warm summer afternoon and he looked forward to sitting in the garden with a glass of watermelon cordial, one of his mother's specialities.

He was rather shocked when he arrived home to see that his mother had company. When he went into the kitchen, he found her sitting at the table with an elderly Koopa whom he had not seen before. She had short white hair and wore a silver robe instead of a shell.

She smiled warmly at Ludwig as he entered the room.

"My darling, you must be Ludwig." Before Ludwig could exit the room, she had him in a warm embrace. "Your mother has told me so much about you, I am so glad I got to meet you myself" she beamed at him through her gold rimmed spectacles. Ludwig relaxed a little. Normally he was nervous around new people, but he felt like he could trust this lady.

"Luddy, this is Veronika, she is an old friend of mine from where I lived before we moved here."

"It's been so wonderful talking with your mother, Ludwig, and I am so happy that I got to meet you, I am very sorry that I can't stop and speak for longer, I am due to catch an airship in half an hour, so I must be on my way."

Ludwig's eyes widened, "You have an airship?" he breathed.

"Yes, I have decided to go on a flying tour of the Kingdoms whilst I am still able because, as you can see, I am getting on a little bit in years. You must come for a ride on the airship - Ebenezer, she's called. Edith has told me how much you love them. I hear you plan on building them when you are older"

Ludwig positively beamed. "I would love to accompany you someday. I don't only want to be an architect though; I also want to be a musician and a scientist" he corrected her.

"Ah, of course, how silly of me to forget. Well, you are a very clever young man and I wish you all the luck in the world for your future endeavours. In fact, I'll make a deal with you." Veronika took a necklace from around her neck, it was a very pretty piece of purple stone attached to a leather cord. "I would like you to look after this necklace for me, Ludwig. You must promise me that you will always wear it and never give it away. If you promise me this, you may come for a ride with me in Ebenezer the next time I visit".

This was an odd promise, thought Ludwig, but he willingly accepted nevertheless and Veronika placed the necklace around his neck. The piece of stone on it caught his attention, he hadn't seen anything like it before, it seemed to shimmer all by itself, as if it were magic.

When he looked up he saw that his mother was seeing Veronika to the door, they were murmuring to each other in low voices so he couldn't make out exactly what they were both saying, all he caught was something his mother said: "Are you sure about this?" and part of Veronika's reply "I am-", but her voice seemed to have changed. It now sounded croaky and more masculine, but he didn't question it. He waved at her from the lounge window and then went back into the kitchen to help his mother make dinner. Usually this was an activity he would have enjoyed, but tonight something was different about his mother, she had an unusual expression on her face, but he couldn't place it.

"Is something vrong?" he asked her.

For a moment, she looked as though she was going to cry, but she turned to him and smiled.

"No, everything is fine Luddy, I am just feeling rather tired. How vas your day at school?"

Ludwig recounted the days events and Edith listened to him intently, relishing the sound of her son's voice. She and Johann had promised all those years ago that they would protect Ludwig, no matter what. Now, she only had to trust herself to do it.

Later that evening, when his mother had gone to bed, Ludwig sat at the desk in his room and studied the stone on his necklace. There was something about it that captivated him. When he looked into it, really looked into it, he felt a warm sensation flood through his body, like embers from a fire. There was something about it that made him feel safe and powerful. The purple light inside it glowed brighter the harder he concentrated on it, which was interesting, he wasn't sure what that meant, but hopefully he would be able to find out someday.

After a while, he slid out of his shell and put on a pair of navy pyjamas with mini silver airships embroidered on them that he had received a few years ago from a relative who had been visiting them. He had never grown very much and was not expected to grow much more due to his parents short stature, so they still fitted him well.

He snuggled under the covers of his bed and was sent off to sleep by the sounds of waves breaking in the distance and a chorus of crickets.

Author's Notes: This chapter took a lot longer to write than I was expecting as I had to change the original plot around a bit, so I apologise for the delay. Thank you so much to everyone who has read the story so far, I really appreciate it! I would like to give a special shoutout to StarlitDuck, who has been the first to review this story. Your kind words mean the world to me, thank you so much! I will see you in chapter 2!

A New Friend

Chapter Two

" Ludwig… Ludwig, are you alright?"

Ludwig opened his eyes and found himself in a strange place. The moon shone brightly in the sky and illuminated the clouds, casting a midnight blue light that lit up his surroundings. He gasped, as he realized that he was not standing on the ground but was actually suspended in the air. As soon as he came to this realization, he felt himself drop, plummeting back towards the ground. He screamed, but it was lost to the wind.

" Ludwig?"

He looked around, frantically, pushing hard to move his head against the force as he fell faster and faster. Where was that voice coming from?

He felt something brush his neck, making him jump. Falling alongside him was the necklace Veronika had given him. It was ***speaking*** *to him, in a voice he was sure he knew but could not place easily. It was a woman's voice, soft and warm and it calmed him to listen to it.*

The stone on the necklace glowed as he focused on its voice and Ludwig found himself fearing it for once. How could he have been given something so powerful that he could not control it?

" Do not fear its power, Ludwig." This time it was a voice he could place, it belonged to his father.

" You are both connected now, you share the same power." His father continued.

" What power?!" Ludwig now had to shout over the noise of the wind, which was getting stronger the longer he fell. "I don't have any power, I'm not a magikoopa!"

This time there was a pause, his father clearly had to think about how to word his reply. Ludwig turned on to his back, hoping his shell would act as a decent shield between him and the approaching ground. He soon wished he had not turned over at all as a large shadow loomed above him; it was not of any discernible shape but had two glowing purple eyes, which made it all the more horrifying. It lifted what Ludwig took to be an arm and aimed a fiery red spell at him. He whimpered.

" It is possible. Sometimes." His father finally replied. "You just have to have an open mind, Lutz, and trust yourself enough to use it".

Ludwig watched the shadow. If he did not act soon it would open fire and kill him. He looked at the necklace and tried to reach it, but every time he tried to grab it, it would move further away from him. The shadow saw his struggle and used it to its advantage, firing the spell towards him. Everything went white and Ludwig let out another piercing scream, but it echoed around him, like he was in some sort of cave.

" Trust yourself, Lutz" his father repeated. "You'll never vin if you don't trust yourself". His voice faded and Ludwig could feel himself slipping away. Beneath him, the floor gave way and he fell into inky blackness, giving a yell of fright that was lost to the endless chasm.

Ludwig woke up with a jolt. He sat up hastily, clutching his chest, still not wholly aware that his nightmare was over. He surveyed his surroundings and appreciatively acknowledged that he was back in his bedroom. He had fallen off of his bed and was laying sprawled on the hard-wooden floor… *again* . This was the fourth consecutive time that he had had that dream, and it always ended the same way, he could just never get over the fear. He knew it was a stupid thing to assume, but he blamed the necklace that Veronika had given him. Ever since he had put it on, he had always had this unsettling dream. Maybe it was trying to tell him something?

He shook his head at that thought. Dreams were just dreams. They did not tell you things. But that was not an adequate answer to his questions surrounding the mysterious stone on the necklace. He

looked down at it and saw that it was burning bright purple. It was always doing this when he woke up, and he was beginning to think that it was tied to his emotions, if that was even possible. He had noticed just the other day how when Elliot had referred to him as 'Toothwig' yet again, it had sparked very suddenly. He had not told his mother about it, for fear that it would worry her. She seemed particularly worried at the moment, but he could not get her to say why.

Ludwig looked at his alarm clock, it was 6:30 am, only half an hour earlier than he usually set it for. That was much better than a couple of nights ago, when he had woken up at 2:45 and been unable to get back to sleep. He washed himself and polished his shell for want of things to do before he made an appearance downstairs for breakfast.

The morning went on just as it always did. Ludwig came top of the class on his physics exam, berating himself for losing the one mark that would have secured him 100% on a question about nuclear decay. Apart from that one rather small disappointment however, things carried on as usual. That is, until lunch break came around.

On a normal day, Ludwig would have eaten his lunch in the library while poring over his textbooks and completing his homework. Today, however, the library had been closed off for a staff meeting, meaning that he would have to go outside and sit in the courtyard amongst the noise of the other children.

He was greeted to a scene akin to a warzone outside. Both the elementary and the senior schools shared the same lunch break which meant that Ludwig had to avoid both excitable younger children, who ran around frantically and the older students, who congregated in large groups and shot disapproving looks at one another. Ludwig could feel eyes on him as he made a beeline for a shady spot under a large tree in one of the corners of the courtyard, where no one was gathered. He figured that he could mostly read in peace there.

Once seated he pulled out his lunch bag and a book called 'Universal Symphonies' that had been handed down to him by his father. It contained music from all kinds of other worlds and Ludwig

had been named after one of the composers 'Ludwig Van Beethoven', who came from a place which his parents called 'Gaia' but was commonly known as 'Earth', due to its lack of magic. Ludwig much preferred the name 'Gaia', as it made the planet sound magical, at least. There was only one pipe that led to this world and travel there was strictly prohibited after the people living there had caught sight of some of the beings from Ludwig's world several years ago, which they deemed to be a threat. The fact that a couple of Toads, possibly one of the most docile species ever, could have frightened the people living on Gaia made Ludwig want to laugh. They must be a foolish species indeed!

Ludwig did not know what to make of travelling to other worlds. On one hand it was fascinating, on the other, frightening. Last week he had heard one of the girls, Kathleen, brag about how her mother's aunt's cousin's friend had travelled down a wrong pipe once and ended up in Whomp's Fortress and had been crushed by one of the said creatures before they could get back. He found it very hard to understand why Kathleen would want to brag about such a terrible event and he highly doubted it was true, but still, Whomps were very dangerous creatures when they became aggressive and they frightened him, so he did not try and press the matter any further.

He browsed through the symphonies in his book, which he now knew off by heart, and played them in his head. He closed his eyes and imagined for a moment that he stood atop a stage, conducting an orchestra. His head swayed to the beat of the music as he hit each note with his baton. He must have gotten too carried away, however, because it drew Elliot's attention and he flounced over with a couple of his older friends.

"Look guys, Toothwig is pretending he's conducting an orchestra!" He mimicked a conductors motions which hit Ludwig with the painful realisation that he himself had just been doing that, having wandered too far into his own imagination. He could feel his cheeks reddening, which added further to the gangs humour. Elliot reached out and swiped Ludwig's book, holding it above his head so that try as he may, the smaller Koopa could not reach it.

"Give… it… back!" Ludwig demanded between breaths, jumping up to try and reclaim his prized possession, but to no avail. All the while

insults were being thrown at him regarding his weight, his hair and his name. Ludwig could feel tears of humiliation burning in his eyes, this was clearly what Elliot had wanted. To humiliate him, to make him cry. He was certainly about to get it.

"Poor Luddy, are we making you upset?" Elliot taunted, smirking. Oh, how Ludwig longed to punch that smug face of his! Elliot, seeing how intent he was to reclaim his book, opened it up and got ready to tear it in half. "Stop it!" Ludwig yelled, not realising that his pendant was glowing brighter and brighter, like a warning.

A pink blur rushed in between Elliot and Ludwig. Elliot looked down at his hands and found that the book had vanished. He turned, bemused, and looked at his friends questioningly, but they looked just as dumbfounded as he did. Ludwig, too, stood stock still, unsure what to make of the situation. After a while he glanced around and saw that a small, stocky Koopa, with a bald pink head was leaning against the tree that he had been sitting under just moments ago. He watched them all, amused by their confusion and produced Ludwig's book from behind his back. He wore a pair of black sunglasses, which made it hard to read his expression.

Elliot glared at him, "Give that back", he demanded.

The Koopa eyed him, unimpressed. "With pleasure", he replied, walking over to Ludwig and handing the book back to him, causing Elliot's glare to intensify, "What?" he questioned him.

"Now leave us" Elliot said.

"So you can get back to pickin' on this guy again?" He indicated to Ludwig as he spoke, "I don't think so, I'd say to go and pick on someone your own size, but you're a midget yourself, so…" he shrugged.

"Are you seriously trying to pick a fight with me… uh…"

"Roy."

"Right, Roy".

Roy gave another shrug. "I don't start fights, that's not me." He

looked Elliot and his gang over and gave an amused smirk "but I could certainly finish this one. Look, I say that we call it even, I really don't wanna have to sink down to the level you guys are on and there ain't no chance you could ever reach my level, seeing as you like to bully kids like him." he indicated to Ludwig again.

For a moment, Elliot looked as though he were about to punch Roy, but thought better of it and walked away, his gang in tow. Ludwig stared at his saviour in awe, he moved his mouth, trying to express his gratitude, but at that moment was struggling to articulate any words at all. Roy gave him a warm smile, or what Ludwig took to be a warm one, it was hard to tell as Roy's eyes were hidden. Nevertheless, he seemed to understand the sentiment of what Ludwig was trying to say.

"Don't sweat it, I ain't just gonna stand by whilst you're gettin' picked on." he explained. Ludwig cringed to hear the amount of contractions that were present in his speech but tried to push that aside for now. He felt that he was going to like Roy, but he didn't recall ever having seen him before.

"Forgive me for asking, but I don't recall seeing you before, are you new to the school?" he asked, having regained the use of his tongue.

"Yeah," Roy began, "Well, not exactly new, I've actually been livin' on the island for almost a year now, but I've only just started out at the school. I was livin' in Westcott with my Grandma beforehand, and it's way too far from there to school, so she tutored me for a bit whilst my dad sorted out a proper house for us, not that it matters, he's hardly around anyway." he said bitterly.

"Oh", Ludwig began, "I am sorry to hear that. Vhat year are you in if you don't mind me asking?"

"I'm in the fifth year. You're in the eighth year, right?"

Ludwig blinked, "How did you know that?" he asked.

"I figured you were the kid that I heard people talkin' about when I saw that guy picking on you. He was holdin' that book you were

trying to get back and I figured that you must be Ludwig. No offence or anything, but who else would be reading during a break? I hear the teachers talking 'bout you a lot, all good things mind you. They call you a prodigy".

Ludwig smiled at him, "I just really like learning, that's all." He sat back down underneath the tree and signalled for Roy to join him. "Thank you again for helping me. This book is particularly important to me and I don't know vhat I would have done if it had been destroyed." He patted the book's cover fondly.

"No worries, I'm glad I could help, just let me know if they give you any more trouble and I'll sort 'em out. What's the book about?" Roy asked.

"It's called 'Universal Symphonies', it is a compilation of classical pieces taken from various other worlds." Ludwig replied as Roy laid down next to him, staring up at the sky.

"Sounds interesting." he commented, not sounding very interested at all.

Both fell silent for a while. Ludwig was terrible at continuing conversations and the responsibility therefore fell to Roy, who appeared to be much more of talker than himself. After a couple of minutes had passed, Roy spoke again.

"Is there a nickname I can call you instead of Ludwig. I thought that 'Luddy' sounded way too condensing."

This made Ludwig laugh, "Condescending?" he corrected.

"Yeah, that."

"Vell," Ludwig thought out loud, "you are the first to ask me that. There aren't a lot of nicknames for 'Ludvig' and I can understand why you don't want to call me 'Luddy'. My father used to call me Lutz. You can call me that if you'd like, it sounds a little more sophisticated."

Roy's expression changed suddenly, Ludwig thought that the word 'sophisticated' may have bewildered him, but it turned out that it was

actually the mention of his father.

"I'm sorry about what happened to your father Ludwig."

"As am I", he sighed "I just try to focus on the good things. I still blame myself for what happened, but I'm moving on, slowly."

Roy turned his head and looked at him.

"If you're ever feeling down and need someone to talk to, you can speak to me. I'm here for you now. But don't blame yourself, Lutz. Never blame yourself."

His kindness surprised Ludwig, and he could feel hot tears stinging his eyes. He rubbed them hastily. What would Roy think of him if he started crying?

Roy managed to take his mind off of his sadness for a moment by asking yet another question. "Do ya speak any German? You certainly have the accent."

Ludwig smiled, "Ja, ein bisschen." He replied.

"Cool, I wish I could speak another language. I dunno if you've realised, but I'm not too big on the whole learnin' thing."

Ludwig put his book down, not wanting to seem rude towards his new friend by reading whilst he spoke. "I vill help you whenever you need it. I'll teach you how to speak German as vell if you're that interested."

"Thanks, Lutz. I appreciate it. I'm glad I met you, I think we're going to be great friends."

Both fell silent again. Roy went back to staring up at the sky and Ludwig returned to his book, both equally happy to have their first proper friend.

Edith stood in front of a long mirror in the library. She placed one of her sharp ivory claws to its centre and drew a line across it. The

surface responded to her touch. It shivered slightly and revealed another room that had blackened walls and contained shelves upon shelves of thick, leather bound books.

"Kamek" she called out "are you there?"

The wizard stepped into view, looking as dishevelled as ever. He wore his usual baggy blue robe but had neglected to put on his pointed hat. He looked rather more tired than usual and Edith could not tell if this was because of his age or because of the threat posed by Silas. Kamek was the advisor to Bowser, King of the Koopas and had pretty much acted as his guardian since the day he discovered him wrapped up in a blanket on the doorstep of his old house. The Kings parents had never been found and Kamek had taken it upon himself to bring him up to be a king, as Koopas were a thoroughly oppressed species that at the time, had no ruler. Edith had so far only had the pleasure of meeting the king once, just before the last battle with Silas nine years ago, when he had been only nineteen years old, and wondered what he was like now. According to Kamek he was still just as grumpy.

"Edith" he croaked "How are you?"

"I am vell thank you, yourself?"

Kamek waved a hand. "Not too bad, not too bad. The King is doing my head in, but that's how it always is here. I can't stay too long though; he'll be wanting me back at any moment. What is it you wanted to ask me?"

Edith did not hesitate to explain. "I am vorried about Ludwig. He has been looking so tired lately and I think it is due to the necklace he was given. Are you sure that was the right thing to do?"

Kamek furrowed his brow, "I think that is due to his needing to get used to it's powers. You must not tell him that the stone is magic, however, nor should you tell him where it came from. He needs to learn to accept it on his own, otherwise he cannot wield its power." He paused for a moment, "Have you told him what happened the night that he was born?" he asked.

Edith let out a sigh. "Not yet, I haven't been able to find a suitable time to tell him, but I will, soon."

"You need to." Kamek urged. "Before it's too late."

"KAMEK!" a deep male voice roared. Kamek groaned.

"He wants me back already? I've only just left! Honestly, how he will ever manage without me I don't know! Sorry Edith, I wish I could stay for longer."

"No, it's ok." She replied. He turned to leave, but she stopped him. "Just one final thing…", she began, and he turned around to face her.

"Yes?"

"If anything happens to me, will you watch over Ludvig in my place and see that he reaches his true potential."

Kamek gave her a warm smile. "You know I would." With that he turned and left. The surface of the mirror shivered again and Edith found herself staring back at her reflection. She looked tired. The stress of recent weeks had been preventing her from sleeping properly and kept her worried at all times. Nevertheless, she pushed on. She must remain strong, she kept telling herself, for Ludwig's sake.

She heard the front door shut and realised that Ludwig had just arrived back at home. She was surprised to see that he was rather excited.

"My little prince, what are you smiling about?" she inquired.

His smile brightened even more, "Mother!" he exclaimed "I made a friend at school today!"

"Really? That's wonderful Luddy!"

They both sat down in the kitchen so that Ludwig could recount the day, he spoke so quickly, such was his delight, that Edith had to ask him to slow down so that she could properly understand him. Words

could not describe how happy she was. Ludwig finally had someone other than her that he could confide in! She had begun to think that he would never find a true friend, although she was surprised at who it was that had approached him. Edith had heard about Roy through the stories circulating around the island about his parents. Rumour had it that Muak, Roy's father, was the leader of a gang on an island almost halfway around the globe that had had a recent run in with the law, causing him to flee and leave Roy at a house on Glass Island, where he knew he would be safe. After hearing what Ludwig had to say about Roy's upbringing, Edith felt terrible. He hadn't had a loving family like her son had, she had no idea that his mother had simply 'walked out' on the family and she didn't understand how someone could go and leave behind their child. All of this, along with wanting to thank him for stopping the bullying, made her desperate to meet Roy and ensure that he had a proper welcome to the island, and so she asked Ludwig:

"Why don't you invite him over one day after school? Or at the weekend?"

Ludwig thought about this for a while. He had never had a friend over to his house before and was slightly nervous at the prospect. But at that moment, he was far too overjoyed to say anything but 'yes'. The prospect of seeing Roy again tomorrow meant that he had the best nights sleep he had had in days, with no nightmares to disturb his slumber. He dreamt only of airships, magic and his new friend that night.

Author's Notes: I finally finished the second chapter! I apologise for the wait, writing dialogue for Roy was a challenge but I am pleased with how it all turned out. I am not sure what kind of accent he has, but I didn't want to just say 'American', as I know there is a huge variety of American accents. Thank you so much to everyone who has read this story so far and a special thanks to CobaltWizard, StarlitDuck, Also Known As A, TailsTheDankEngine and DigimonWarrior 15. Your continued support of this story is much appreciated!

Defending Wendy O

Chapter Three

Ludwig welcomed the change that Roy brought to his monotonous schooldays with great eagerness. He no longer had to face being alone and he had someone who he could confide in. He even dared to believe that since Roy had entered his life he had gotten ever so slightly more confident, he hadn't even known him for more than four weeks, it was truly a miracle!

Roy, too, had noticed a change in himself. He was happy, for once in his life, Ludwig was the first true friend he had ever made, all the others had been fake, promising him that he could trust them only to turn around later and stab him in the back. He had always had trouble opening up to others and that had gotten worse over the years. Ludwig, however, was different from the rest, Roy just knew that he could trust him. Every day at morning break Ludwig would help Roy with his homework and tutor him in the subjects that he struggled with. Ludwig's work was paying off, Roy's grades looked to be on the rise. The only real challenge he found himself faced with was trying to stop Roy using so much slang. He had tried exceptionally hard but had eventually given it up as a bad job, there would be plenty of time to try to do so over the summer holidays, which were now only one week away. He felt positively rejuvenated. Ever since he had met Roy, he had felt like a new Koopa. He had slept better and had hardly had a single nightmare. Roy had also distracted him from his grief and he had noticed that he had not felt nearly as down in recent weeks.

Ludwig already knew Roy quite well, given the fact that they now spent all of their spare time together. His mother had left Roy and his father five years ago when Roy was only three, so he didn't remember too much about her other than the fact that her name was Kaiya and she had (at the time, at least) long chestnut brown hair. His father travelled a lot, but Roy was reluctant to disclose what exactly his father did and Ludwig did not pressure him to say anything. Roy was a good talker; he could find his way around a

question without actually answering it better than any politician. He wore his sunglasses to cover up the fact that he had a lazy eye, something that had often led to ridicule in his previous schools. He used to have brown hair, like his mother, but had shaved it off a couple of years after she had left. People gave him funny looks because of his bald head occasionally, but Roy did not care what they thought, the sunglasses complemented him, as did his shaved head but Ludwig could not care less about his looks. Ludwig had not yet seen Roy take his sunglasses off but figured he would eventually when he felt more comfortable around him.

Despite how nice Roy was, he struggled with his anger and was prone to frequent mood swings. He could become agitated and irritable very quickly. Ludwig was still trying to find a way to help Roy cope with these mood swings but had so far not found a way to do so.

Today was unfortunately one of Roy's bad days, he had been sulky since they had arrived at school and had barely said a word, only breaking this to snap responses back at Ludwig when he asked any questions. He didn't tutor Roy on bad days, as he knew they weren't going to get anywhere. Instead they sat outside whilst Ludwig read and Roy glared up at the sky through his sunglasses. The likely cause of Roy's anger today was his father, who had been visiting recently. Muak's favourite thing to do was criticize his son and Roy had been cleaning the house for days to make sure that there was nothing for him to complain about. Roy had practically brought himself up, meaning that he was good at cooking, as well as housekeeping. Ludwig had no idea how his friend managed to do it all by himself. He had often offered to help Roy with his chores, but he seemed reluctant to take Ludwig to his home, possibly because he was afraid that he would be judged. Ludwig had still made it known that he was always at hand to help him, which Roy appreciated, even if he didn't show it.

As they sat under the shade of their favourite tree in the courtyard, Ludwig thought to himself about the last day of school. After much debate it had finally been decided that Roy would go and stay with Ludwig and Edith for the first weekend of the summer holidays, which both looked forward to immensely. Roy's bad moods never

lasted long so Ludwig was hoping that he would recover from this one soon, otherwise he mightn't want to go and stay with them. He wanted Roy to be able to relax and have some time to just be a normal child, even though he and Ludwig were anything but normal.

"I've told a few of my team about the incident at Silverlake, it did not go well" was Verne's opening statement to Edith, Quinn and Daniel, who sat crowded into the Von Koopa's library once again, drinking coffee as they talked. They were discussing possible ways to prolong the amount of time it took Silas to make good on his promise to kill the residents of Glass Island. If they could hold him off for long enough, King Bowser may get back to full power and be able to stop him before he caused mass devastation. He had been battling someone who called themselves 'Lord Fawful'. They had wanted to take over the Koopa Kingdom and had been more powerful than Bowser had bargained for but in the end he and his troops had beaten him pretty badly and he was deemed to no longer be a threat. Bowser had even been quoted saying that he believed he would never hear the name again.

Verne, Daniel, Edith and Quinn were, in effect, a miniature army. The four of them were attempting to save the island and they had to be extremely careful with who they could trust, lest information escaped. Unfortunately, no one had come up with anything that they could do in order to try and prevent Silas from returning for a while.

"I understand that it did not vork out as planned," Edith stated, who had been in attendance during the meeting, "but maybe if we told the general public only about his return and left the Silverlake part out, it would lessen their worry?"

"No, there's been a cordon there for four weeks now, guarded by some of Bowser's Koopa Paratroopas, they caught a group of kids trying to access the site, so it is only a matter of time before rumours spread and cause more panic than the truth would. We have no choice but to tell them." Verne stated.

"And risk them leaving the island?" Daniel interjected, "No way. If our residents spread out to other lands then Silas will track them all down and kill even more of our species. Edith is right, we should leave the murders out of it."

The party fell silent, none of them wanting to face the fact that they may not all still be standing after the battle with Silas, which was bound to happen eventually, no matter what they did.

Quinn sighed, "What, exactly is the point of gathering here if we can't agree on anything? We need to come up with a plan now, or… or" he stopped and swallowed uncomfortably "or he's going to kill all of us." His voice contained much more force than usual and it took Daniel aback. He had been Quinn's partner for almost twelve years now and he had never seen him as tense as he was now. He had been increasingly nervy since Johann's death, or, rather, murder as they now knew. Quinn had known Johann before Daniel had even moved to the island, so he put it down to grief at first, but it appeared that Quinn had had a premonition of what was to come. Either way, it was heart-breaking to witness his lover living every day in fear. He pulled him into his arms and embraced him in an effort to calm him, ruffling his long black hair with his claws. "It's alright, we will come up with a plan, I promise." He reassured. After a while, Quinn seemed to have relaxed, and so the group returned to brainstorming.

The ideas they had seemed to actually get worse. Verne suggested covering the island with hidden piranha plants that would be able to track Silas by scent, but given their aggressive nature, it could only end in disaster, so that ship was quickly abandoned. It was beginning to all seem rather hopeless until Edith suddenly piped up with: "Magic!"

They all turned to face her.

"It isn't fool proof" she admitted "but I think that if ve give it enough thought it could vork." She went on to explain her plan, "Ve know that Kamek can create magical barriers that are strong. I vas thinking that ve could find a vay to create a magic barrier to cover the entire island. Kamek couldn't do it by himself but a group of Magikoopas certainly could."

Verne mulled it over. "Well, it's certainly worth a try. Nothing else we've come up with would work, but this plan certainly looks promising".

The tension in the room dispersed and the group visibly relaxed a little. At least now they were getting somewhere, Silas hadn't won yet!

"Alright, I vill speak to Kamek as soon as I can. He is extremely busy at the moment helping the King get all of the royal troops ready to fight, but I'm sure he'll help us." Edith told her three friends.

"Excellent. I don't know what I would do without you, Edith." Verne confessed. "We'd all be in a lot of trouble, that's for sure!"

Quinn and Daniel finished their drinks and headed back home. Quinn was due to go on patrol in Astrowatch for the next few hours and Daniel was being posted at Silverlake to help the Paratroopas maintain the cordon. He had insisted that Quinn be kept away from the site for his own wellbeing.

After they had gone, Verne moved to sit closer to Edith, who had gotten up momentarily to wash and put away the used mugs. When she returned, he turned to face her and asked, quite unexpectedly: "Would you accompany me to dinner on Friday night."

Edith felt shocked, she had known Verne for almost fifteen years and he had never asked her to go anywhere with him before. He didn't have any family nearby and was very lonely, Edith thought, but how odd to ask her! She didn't want to hurt his feelings, and so agreed to accompany him. He asked if Ludwig would also go, having always been fond of Edith's son and his eccentricities but unfortunately, he could not, as that was the evening that Roy would be coming round, so it would just be the two of them, something that Verne was secretly very happy about, it would make his question a lot easier to ask.

Ludwig emerged from the main hall, thoroughly pleased with how his biology exam had gone that morning. His year group were the last to sit their exams, which was rather annoying as the noise from outside was far higher, with all of the senior and elementary students being excited with the approach of the summer holidays. Ludwig was not easily distracted but at one point a large crash from outside the hall, accompanied by the shouts of a teacher, had made him jump. It had had a far more severe impact on Elliot, who nearly jumped out of his

shell and managed to spill ink all over his paper, making some of the answers unreadable. This had greatly amused Ludwig to watch and he felt that Elliot had been very deserving of this punishment. Unfortunately, Elliot had caught sight of Ludwig's smirk and scowled at him, not that Ludwig could have cared less. He was confident that he had done very well on all of his exams so far and wasn't going to let one mean-spirited Koopa ruin it for him.

It was a terribly hot day and he was grateful for the shade that the tree offered in the courtyard.

Roy, although still sulky, was marginally better than he had been that morning, which Ludwig interpreted as a good sign. He asked him how his exam had gone, more out of courtesy than anything else, and then went back to being more or less completely silent. Ludwig cracked open a book and began to read, pausing every now and then to take a bite of his lunch, putting the food into the side of his mouth, so that his protruding front tooth didn't get in the way. Upon opening the book, he was immediately enraptured in the matters it discussed on the pros and cons of self-steering airships and completely tuned out to what was going on around him. He did not, therefore, hear the sobs that were coming from the other side of the tree, but Roy did. He peered around, unable to see who it was that was making the noise.

"Lutz" He mouthed, before realising that his friend was in another world altogether. He nudged him. "Lutz" he said in a far more audible tone. Ludwig jumped and turned to face him. "Mreph?" he answered through a mouthful of sandwich.

"Do ya hear that? Roy questioned.

Ludwig listened. "Is that crying I can hear?"

"Sounds like it. I'm gonna go check it out, I can't stand hearing someone cry. Back me up, will ya?"

He did not give Ludwig time to reply as he leapt up and walked around the tree to the other side. Shoving the remainder of his sandwich into his mouth, Ludwig hastily got up and followed him.

He found Roy crouched in front of a small female Koopa, who had her face buried into her knees and was bawling her eyes out. A shredded red hair ribbon lay on the ground next to her. She had a bald head, unusual for a female Koopa, and had a pink and white spiked shell.

Ludwig was completely useless at speaking, let alone consoling, so he left that to Roy, who had become surprisingly tender at that moment, and let him work his magic.

"Hey" he spoke softly "What's up?"

She lifted her head and gazed at him through glazed blue eyes, there was a look of contempt set on her face. "Have you come to laugh at me" she demanded of them.

"No." Roy's tone changed to be much firmer, "Is that what's upsetting you?"

She continued to eye him sceptically, "What's it to you anyway?"

"You're crying and you're alone, someone has obviously upset you otherwise you'd be with someone to talk to about it. I want to know what's happened, I hate it when people cry, especially pretty girls."

Something in her expression changed when Roy uttered the latter line. Tears started to brim in her eyes again "You really think I'm pretty?" she asked him. Roy nodded.

"Of course I do, why would I lie?" he responded.

She started crying again. "Thank you, that's the nicest compliment I've had in a long time." Roy pulled her into an embrace as she sobbed out all of the sadness that she had bottled up. Ludwig shuffled over to the side of them and patted the back of her shell hoping that the comforting smile he had plastered on his face wasn't terrifying her.

After a while, her crying ebbed away once again. Ludwig decided he would chance an introduction, feeling slightly more comfortable with speaking while Roy was with him.

"I'm Ludwig Von Koopa, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance." He said as he helped her to her feet.

She smiled slightly as she shook his hand. "Nice to meet you, Ludwig. I am Wendy Ophelia Koopa, but people just call me 'Wendy O.', I don't care for my middle name." she confessed.

"Vhy not? Ophelia is a lovely name." Ludwig piped in.

"It's just so outdated, I've never met anyone else with the same name."

"What does that matter? It makes you much more unique." Roy told her.

"That's not always a good thing." Wendy indicated to her head. "Being 'unique' is what made those girls over there call me ugly and destroy my hair ribbon." She indicated to a small group of girls gathered slightly away from them, a few of which were shooting suspicious looks at them and then indicated to the shredded red ribbon on the floor.

"Us balds, eh?" Roy said "Always gettin' grief for our looks. I think that it suits the both of us, though. As I like to say, 'Be confident, and if anyone says anythin' give 'em hell.'"

Wendy looked thoughtful. "I guess…"

Roy stood back up. "Could you give me a minute?"

Wendy nodded and he went trotting off in the direction of the group of girls, who looked slightly alarmed at his approach, as Roy was very burly, which subsequently made him appear quite threatening. He exchanged some harsh sounding words with a red-haired girl, who appeared to be the leader of the group, as she was the only one who didn't recoil as Roy approached and then he came straight back to them, leaving the red haired-girl and her cronies glaring after him.

"They won't trouble you again. If they do, just let me know and I'll sort 'em out, they're all talk and no walk." He grinned. Wendy smiled at him.

"Thank you… er"

"Names Roy, Roy Koopa."

"Thank you, Roy."

"No worries." He smiled at her warmly. "Me an' Lutz are sitting round the other side of the tree if you wanna join us? I think the three of us are going to be great friends!"

Verne had completed his duties for the day and was making his way back home. He had just visited Silverlake to check with the Paratroopas that all was well. They had nothing to report that was any different from yesterday or the day before that. There had been no sign of Silas, he was likely in a remote region of the world or masquerading as someone else through the streets of some large city. He certainly wasn't on Glass Island though, and that brought a sense of great relief to Verne. He wanted Silas dead after the amount of pain that he had caused Edith by killing Johann. He had first met the Von Koopa's on the day that they immigrated to Glass Island, as he liked to greet all of their new arrivals personally in order to make them feel welcomed. The moment he had laid eyes on Edith he had loved her. She was so kind and warm-hearted. He had seen how much Johann cared for her and her for him. Deep down he had struggled to like Johann because of how much Edith loved him, but now he wished that he were still alive. He could not bear to see how Edith had changed. Like Quinn, she always looked afraid now and there was a dark side to every laugh, crawling with remembrance of the past. She wasn't afraid for herself, being a completely unselfish Koopa. It was Ludwig that she was worried about. Silas had made clear his intentions to kill him, having failed on his previous attempt. The fact that Ludwig could have died as well was now haunting her wherever she went, even though she insisted that she was fine.

He let out a sigh. He intended to tell Edith how he felt when they went out for dinner, although he was already starting to talk himself out of it. He didn't want to cause her any more pain than she was currently going through. After all, Johann's death was still fresh on her mind, which didn't help matters very much. He wished he had never brought her into the war but having something to fight for

really did seem to be the only thing keeping her going. Looking back, it was what made her such a capable leader, Verne thought to himself as he strolled along the path to his house.

The mayor's house was easily identifiable amongst the others, as it was painted a Teal shade, symbolising importance. It was a little larger than the other houses, something that embarrassed Verne, as he had it all to himself. The house was surrounded by a freshly cut lawn and surrounded by a black metal fence, not that security was really needed on Glass Island, as everybody knew everyone, meaning that crimes were almost inexistent. Unlike the mayors before him (Verne had been in office for a total of fifteen years, having just been voted in for a fourth time due to immense popularity) Verne did not employ any security to guard the entrance to his home, wanting his citizens to know that his doors were always open if they had any problems. This had gained him a lot of respect from the population of Glass Island, as Verne wanted to be just like them, and did not crave attention or fame as so many mayors before him had.

He gave the front door a shove as it was becoming increasingly reluctant to open and needed servicing, he just had not had time to get it sorted. It didn't budge the first time, so Verne took a step back and shoulder charged it, almost falling in a heap on the floor when it budged but managing to recover himself just in time. He stumbled down the hallway, depositing his bag in the study as he passed it. As he arrived in the kitchen, he saw that somebody was already there and clutched his chest in fright. The figure was sitting in a chair, staring out of the kitchen window and into Verne's back garden, which had become rather scruffy of late, with Verne being too busy to tend to it.

"Er… hello?" Verne asked, "Can I help you?"

No movement, nothing. Maybe they were hard of hearing? Verne warily began to approach them.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" he called out, in a sterner tone, which caught the person's attention. They whipped around without warning, brandishing a dagger in one hand and pointing it straight at Verne's heart.

Verne leapt back in fright, but one look at the persons face made him relax.

"Holy Goombas, Muak, you scared me!"

The figure removed the hood of the robe that they were wearing to reveal a pink headed male Koopa with short, wavy, dirty blonde hair and amber eyes that sparkled slightly when the light hit them. He had a dark pink shell, with golden rings encompassing the spikes and on his right arm was a tattoo of a small pink shell with a pair of wings and the caption: " *United we stand. United we fall."* encircling the image.

"Sorry about that." Muak put the dagger back in its sheath around his waist. "I was, as they say, lost in thought."

"What are you doing back here?" Verne asked, the seriousness in his voice clear. "I thought you were world hopping to try and keep Silas off of your trail."

Muak assessed him for a moment. Then he turned back to the window before saying "Where was our last meeting place?"

Verne looked him in the eyes, realising that their conversation could go no further until the question was answered. He closed his eyes and said "We last met in the Forest of Illusion."

Muak was satisfied with this. "My gang members all went down different pipes, each with a fake copy of the book", as he said this, he whisked a thick, leather-bound book out of his shell and held it out to Verne, who looked horrified.

"Why in the name of all that is good have you brought that back here!" he demanded.

Muak gave a relaxed response. "Kamek said to bring it back when the time is right. That time is now." He shoved the book into Verne's hands. "I trust you know who you're going to bequeath it to." He looked at the mayor and saw the fear in his eyes. "Don't worry", he reassured "he ain't followed me back, everyone knows that if you follow the leader you'll find either a trap or a red herring."

"I…I.." stammered Verne. Muak pulled his robe back around him.

"Nice chat, but I've gotta go now. Better see how Roy's been coping without his old man around, not that I suspect he cares. See you around, Verne." He paused by the front door on his way out, "And by the way, if you do decide that you want a bit more security on the island, let me know. My gang members will be happy to help you out."

The minute he heard the door slam, Verne collapsed into a chair, staring at the book he had been given with a look of horror.

"Higher! Higher!" Wendy shrieked as Roy threw her up into the air and caught her back in his arms.

"I will in a minute, just let me get my breath back." Roy gasped. He was strong, but no match for a boisterous six-year-old. Wendy's energy levels appeared to be almost completely inexhaustible. Ludwig giggled. For all her seriousness at the beginning of their acquaintanceship, Wendy was really just excitable and fun-loving, like most young Koopas.

They were on their way back home from school and all three were heading into Astrowatch, Wendy because she lived there and Ludwig because he was accompanying Roy into town as he had asked for advice regarding something that was not yet clear. After around ten minutes, they reached a fork in the main road and Wendy bade them farewell.

Roy and Ludwig continued on for a little while before speaking. Roy was the first to break the silence.

"I'm sorry Lutz, I was real mean to you earlier."

Ludwig stopped walking and faced him. "It's ok. I just vish you would tell me vhat vas on your mind, then I could help you".

"I know, I'll try harder. You deserve better Lutz, much better."

"Don't vorry, I'm always here for you if you need me." Ludwig hugged him gently for a moment, hoping that this gesture would make Roy feel better. After a while Roy wriggled free of his grasp,

feeling slightly awkward. He wasn't any good with words and hated physical contact but was willing to make exceptions for Ludwig and Wendy.

"Vhere is it you vanted to go?" Ludwig asked him.

Roy moved off, "C'mon, I'll show you".

After a few more minutes of walking they arrived at the High Street and Roy walked into a sewing shop and began to look around. Ludwig was very confused by this.

"Vhat vas it you vanted my help vith?" he inquired.

"I need you to help me pick out some fabric. I'm gonna make another bow for Wendy to replace the one that those kids ruined."

"Vhat exactly makes you think I know about vhich fabrics suit people?" Ludwig questioned.

"Ya tryin' to tell me that with all that hair, ya haven't had to tie it back at least once?" Roy retorted.

Ludwig narrowed his eyes. "Alvright, you got me. But I don't know vhat colour vould suit Vendy." He looked around and picked out a pink fabric with white polka dots. "How about this one? It is the same colours as the ones on her shell."

Roy looked at it thoughtfully for a moment. "You're right. I think that would suit her perfectly, thanks Lutz." Ludwig handed the fabric roll over to him and Roy went over to one of the employees to get a length cut. After purchasing it, the two Koopa's parted ways, each heading home after a busy day.

Ludwig, despite being able to ace a test without the need to revise, was planning on revising anyway when he got home. His mother would not be home until later that evening, she was busy tutoring the children of a particularly wealthy family in Astrowatch, who didn't attend school. Ludwig was expecting to therefore have the house to himself but was surprised to find Verne waiting for him when he arrived.

"I'm sorry, mother is out at the moment." he said as he approached him. As he got closer he saw that Verne had a very dishevelled appearance. His brown shoulder length hair, which was now beginning to show a few grey threads, was ruffled and he looked as though he hadn't brushed it in several days. He had slight bags under his eyes upon closer inspection and when he spoke Ludwig was certain he could smell alcohol.

"That's alright, son. It was you I was after." He said, his voice slightly jittery, as if he were afraid of something. Ludwig was concerned about him.

"Vill you come in and have something to drink, sir? If you don't mind me saying you don't sound very vell."

"No, no, I'm perfectly fine, thank you. I must be on my way shortly." Verne gave what sounded to be a forced laugh. "Lots of work to do in town, you know."

"Oh, alvright. Vhat can I help you vith?" Ludwig remained polite, but was beginning to feel afraid. Verne had never acted in such a curious manner before. He watched the mayor reach into his shoulder bag and pull out a slim, brown, leather-bound book. He looked at it for a moment, biting his lip as he did so, as if he were having second thoughts on what he were about to do. After a while he held it out to Ludwig.

"I need you to look after this for me, Ludwig. Promise me you will."

"Okay…" Ludwig said in a small and uncertain voice.

"You can't let him- I mean, anyone, see it, alright?"

"Alvright." Ludwig agreed, eager to have this conversation over with. He must have been fiddling with the necklace due to his nerves, because when Verne caught sight of it, his eyes widened in shock.

"How did you-" he began, trying to stop himself from saying too much. "Who gave you that?"

"Oh," he had not meant to draw attention to it and racked his brain to come up with a reason "It vas given to me by one of my mother's

friends as a gift."

That's a good reason, right? He questioned himself, wondering why Verne seemed so horrified that he was in possession of a necklace. Did he perhaps know something about its origins?

Verne let out an unstable laugh. "A gift!" he said incredulously, "They gave it to you as a *gift* ?"

"Yes, do you know anything about it?" Ludwig asked him calmly, figuring that he might as well ask now he had been given the chance.

"Know anything about it? Why, it's-" Verne stopped abruptly. He could not tell Ludwig, a nine-year-old, about where the stone had come from. Kamek and Edith must have decided that knowledge was best kept to themselves, not wanting to place such a young Koopa in danger. He sighed.

"What was the name of the person who gave it to you?" he asked, wondering if the 'friend' in question was indeed Kamek in some sort of disguise.

"She vas called Veronika. Vhy? Do you know her?"

The child spoke only in questions and it annoyed Verne. He knew it was his fault for initiating conversation in the first place, but he had enough to deal with as it stood. He answered briefly "No, I don't.", before getting back to the subject of the book. "I am sorry if I am coming across as rude." Verne practically had to force the apology from his lips. What was happening was not Ludwig's fault and he had no knowledge of Silas or what he was capable of. He took a deep breath and continued, "But this is extremely important, Ludwig. I'm not allowed to say why, so to you what I say will sound like the ravings of an old man, but you cannot let that book out of your sight. You must keep it with you, or keep it hidden, at all times. Don't let anyone open it or read it and do not give it away, no matter what anyone tries to bribe you with. This is a lot to be asking I know, but can I trust you to do this?"

Ludwig nodded, "Of course you can trust me. I can tell that this is

important to you. I can't offer much more than to say that I von't let you down."

A crunching noise made both Koopa's look up. Behind the trees, Verne caught a glimpse of Edith, returning down the gravel path. What was she doing back so soon! Hadn't Ludwig just said she was going to be working until later? Verne, in a last desperate attempt to get the importance of the task at hand known, grabbed Ludwig by his shoulders and said in a rough whisper: " *Promise me".*

Ludwig could feel sweat trickling down his neck. Verne was terrifying him, but at the same time he felt immense sympathy for him. He was clearly afraid of something.

"I promise, sir. Cross my heart."

Verne stayed holding on to him for a moment, a look of approval crossing his face, before taking off in the opposite direction as Edith and pelting through the woods. Unfortunately, he wasn't quite fast enough, as Edith glimpsed him disappearing into the trees.

"Luddy? Vas that Verne?" she asked her son, who was rooted to the spot and still had a look of confusion mixed with fear upon his face. He nodded, dumbly.

"Yes, he vas just stopping by." Ludwig prayed that that explanation would suffice.

"Vhy vas he in such a hurry? It almost seemed as though he didn't vant me to see him." Edith had intended the latter part of her sentence as a joke, but it hit Ludwig like a sack of bricks. Did she know he was lying?

"H-he said something about vork" Ludwig mumbled.

"I see, how vas your day my little prince?" she continued, dismissing his stammering tone. "The children I vas tutoring are going to a party tonight with their family, so I got to leave early."

"Good, thank you. Me and Roy have both made a new friend, her name is Vendy. She vas having problems with some bullies, but Roy put a stop to that. Is it alright vith you if I invite her to the sleepover

also?" he inquired, feeling more relaxed.

"If her parents agree, then I am happy for you to do that. I'll let you know now that I spoke with Verne this morning and he has invited me over for dinner on Friday, so I'll be trusting you all to get to bed in time."

"Okay. I'll take good care of them when they're here. You can trust us." Ludwig said with a warm smile.

His smile made Edith smile. Ludwig's overbite made all his expressions look cute, especially when he was focusing on something, like studying. She looked at the book he was holding. "Vhere did you get that? I don't recognize it." She questioned.

Ludwig flinched as he realised, he had not put the book in his bag. He hated lying, but right now, he had no choice. "It's er, a book".

"Yes dear, I can see that. Who gave it to you?"

"Ve- I mean, Roy. Roy gave it to me."

Edith narrowed her eyes, "I thought he didn't read."

"Um, he doesn't read *much* ." Ludwig scolded himself for having spoken about Roy so much. How could his mother remember all the tiny details of what he had said?

"Alright, vhat is this book about?" Edith asked suspiciously.

"Fairy tales." He blurted out. "It's just some old fairy tales."

Edith decided not to press the matter any further. After all, it was only a book. But what was it that was making Ludwig act so nervously? More so, what business had Verne visiting him. She wouldn't mind betting that the book Ludwig was so reluctant to talk about had been given to him by Verne, she would ask him about it on Friday. Until then, she pretended not to be too interested in it, which meant Ludwig would relax.

It was coming up to midnight. Under the covers, using a torch for light, Ludwig pored over the book Verne had given him (he had said

not to show it to anyone, but he hadn't said that Ludwig couldn't read it!). When he had first opened it, he had felt a warm sensation flow through his veins and the stone had sparked to life on his necklace and changed from purple to blue. That was a first but Ludwig could not question anyone about it, as it needed to be kept secret, so he kept on the act of indifference he had been using since he had received it. Tomorrow he would check out every book on geology that the school library had and see if he could unearth anything about this mysterious stone.

The leather cover on the book was very frail, so Ludwig had to make sure that he handled the book ever so carefully. He didn't want Verne to think that he couldn't be trusted to keep an item in one piece!

What was funny was that the title suggested that it was full of fairy tales and mythical creatures, when what it actually contained were what appeared to be spells in a language that looked like a latin-something hybrid.

Ludwig sat up for a moment and let out a mischievous giggle. He knew it wouldn't work but pointed a claw at a potted plant on his windowsill and whispered " *luminibus flammae arrectis".*

As expected, nothing happened. Ludwig felt oddly disappointed even though he had known it would not work. Wouldn't being able to use magic be fun? He grinned to himself as he thought about all of the pranks he could play on Elliot and his gang.

He placed the book underneath his pillow and snuggled down underneath the covers, thinking about tomorrow and how much he was looking forward to his mathematics exam in the morning.

" You still have much to learn, my son, but you are now vell on your vay."

It was his father, calling out to him again. Ludwig could not see anything this time, however. He was simply floating around in darkness.

" Vati?" he called out, "Vhere are you?"

There was no answer, only silence and darkness. Everything was still for a moment before Ludwig felt himself being lowered to the ground. His necklace glowed and revealed the outlines of six figures surrounding him, which looked like Koopas. Two had quite burly outlines, whilst another was tall and lanky and stood next to one that was quite the opposite, being particularly tiny.

" They can help you, Lutz. You've already found two, soon it vill be time to find the others." Johann's voice had a foreboding ring to it.

" Vhat do you mean? Who's they?" Ludwig shouted into the void.

" Your friends, of course." Was his father's reply.

Ludwig was about to say that he only had two friends when the ground gave way and he fell into nothingness. He screamed but all his father replied with was: "Trust yourself, Lutz. Use the book and the necklace and trust yourself."

Ludwig pondered what this meant as he continued plummeting down, down, down into the jaws of darkness and back into reality.

Author's Notes: Well, after over a month, I present you with chapter three! Thank you for bearing with me. A huge shoutout to StarlitDuck. I would like to dedicate this chapter to you as a late birthday gift!

I would also like to thank Amethyst Goldenwind for following my story, TheGhostlyRobot for favouriting it and 08rocben, Dystopic1819 and UvoMin for following and favouriting it. Your support is greatly appreciated!

For reference in this chapter, 'Vati' is German for 'Dad', which is what I believe Ludwig would call his father. I struggled coming up with names for spells and therefore went with the Latin words for 'Flickering flames' as a fire spell, which translates into 'luminibus flammae arrectis'. Please note that I know no Latin and have therefore relied on Google Translate to provide me with the wording, so it may not be entirely correct.

See you in chapter four!

Summer Interlude

Chapter Four

"Whew, I'm glad that's over." Roy exhaled. The prizegiving assembly which signalled the end of the academic year had just taken place and he, Ludwig and Wendy were now making their way back to Ludwig's house for the sleepover. The two guests had dropped their overnight bags off the night before, and it was a good thing they did, Ludwig had won almost all the academic prizes that were available and would have struggled to carry them all by himself. He had stuffed all of his certificates into his bag and carried as many of the trophies he had won as he could. Roy and Wendy each carried a couple, but Ludwig was hugely insistent on not letting his guests worry about carrying his things. The journey back was therefore a slow one as Ludwig was continually stopping to adjust what he was holding. At one point he managed to drop the mathematics cup onto Roy's foot, leading to Roy throwing his head back and bellowing at the top of his lungs, teaching Wendy a new word. She turned to Ludwig, "What does that mean?" she asked, curiously.

"It is a very bad word to use, it's a vulgar term for…" Ludwig trailed off. He was wise beyond his years and knew what the word meant, but Wendy was far too young to know its true meaning, so he invented a more child friendly one. "It is a very rude term for a stupid person. You must promise never to repeat it." He told her, glaring daggers at Roy who was clutching his foot and sucking in air through gritted teeth.

"What?" he demanded "Damn thing hurt like a son of a bi-" Ludwig's glare intensified. Wendy did not need to learn any more bad words. "-scuit." Roy corrected himself. "Hurt like a biscuit." He shot Ludwig a look that seemed to say, 'Are you happy now?' which made Ludwig burst out laughing, with the others eventually following suit. No one stayed angry with anyone for long.

By the time they arrived at the house, Edith was gone, but she had left a note for their guests, insisting that they make themselves at

home and help themselves to any food in the kitchen.

Ludwig played the part of host well, keeping his friends entertained throughout the late afternoon and early evening. There was no official bedtime set for him and Roy, but they had vowed to try and get to bed at around ten, as Wendy's mother had warned them about how hyperactive she could become and frankly, she was hyperactive enough as it was.

The evening drew on quickly as a result of the fun they were having. They played board games, held numerous competitions in the garden and ate so much cake that Roy seriously doubted that he would ever be able to look at it the same way again. Wendy had received a set of nail polishes for her sixth birthday and, under the insistence that she never tell a soul, gave Roy and Ludwig manicures. Excluding the latter, Ludwig had never had more fun in his life. His troubles surrounding the necklace that Veronika had given him and the book that Verne had insisted he hide had at that moment evaporated, but his questions still remained unanswered. How did Verne know Veronika? Ludwig knew that they weren't related but Verne was very cynical when her name was brought up, even though he had said he didn't know her. Ludwig decided that Verne was therefore lying. Why, he did not know, but he vowed that he would find out.

Stranger still was the book itself. It contained many spells, instead of the fairy tales promised on the front cover. They were written in Latin, he had now deciphered, and came with a strong warning that ' *those who seek to harm shall not prevail',* whatever that meant. On top of this, whenever he handled the book the stone on the necklace would light up like mad and wouldn't stop glowing until he distanced himself from it. Having made good on his personal oath to check all of the geology books out of the library had been fruitless and he had found nothing in them that could be linked to the type of stone in question, but he did manage to bore himself so much reading about the formation of igneous rocks that he fell asleep at his desk one night. He was beginning to suspect that the stone had some sort of charm on it that perhaps linked it to his emotions, but it was so hard to tell with no one who he could ask.

As promised, he hadn't told a soul about the book (it was currently

being stashed on a shelf in the family library, as it's brown cover rendered it virtually indistinguishable from the others already there, so the likelihood of it being picked up was slim). Ludwig knew that he would have to keep the book 'on the move' so to speak, as his mother seemed suspicious about it and he had begun to notice that she would sneak around the house during the night and, he had noticed, during the day. He would not have realised this had she not left one of his desk drawers in such a state. It was lucky that he had decided to take the book to school with him that day, as the drawer had been its original home. For now, though, his questions were unimportant. All he had to do was keep the objects a secret.

"Hey, Lutz." Roy's voice broke Ludwig out of his trance, "Shall we make a bonfire in the garden? We could make s'mores!"

Ludwig, never one to pass up an opportunity to eat, assented and the three of them headed outside to gather some wood to make a fire.

"You gave that book to *Ludwig* ." Edith screeched. "Vhat the hell are you playing at giving *that book* – a book filled with *highly dangerous* spells, to a *nine-year-old* ?!"

"Edith – please, let me explain." Verne stammered. His attempts to get a word in for the past five minutes had been futile as Edith had been lecturing him about his misdeed. "I-".

"And not only that," she interrupted, "but *that book* is currently being pursued by *Silas,* of all people, a *very strong* magic vielder who vill stop at nothing – I repeat, *nothing* – to get his claws on it!"

Verne saw that she had no intentions of stopping any time soon. His years in office had shown him the point at which someone became unreasonable. Of course, Edith had a reason to be angry with him, what she was saying was true, he had given a book that contained potentially dangerous spells to her nine-year-old son, but what she didn't know was that it was Kamek's suggestion in the first place, he had simply acted upon *his* judgement, not having any magical abilities himself. He rather wished she would lower her voice,

though, as he didn't want her ravings to fall upon unwelcome ears. If one resident heard about Silas' return, the news would spread like wildfire and the whole island would know within hours, leading to mass panic which was the last thing that Verne needed at the moment. His people would all be much harder to protect than they were in their current state of ignorance. Edith sensed his worry – perhaps he had squinted due to the shrillness of her voice – as she lowered it and resorted to hissing at him instead.

"I don't know if you've realised, Verne, but Ludwig isn't exactly the pinnacle of athleticism. He couldn't fight off a Gooma, let alone Silas, a wielder of shadow magic!"

Now was the time for Verne to weigh in, and he did so accordingly, with as much professionalism as he could muster. "Physically, no, he is nowhere near a match for Silas. But mentally – I would say they are more or less evenly matched." He used 'mentally' instead of 'magically' as Edith hated to be reminded of her sons powers. It triggered inside her an onslaught of guilt that, had she watched Ludwig more carefully that night he had hatched, he may not have inherited them. Had she arrived *just* a fraction of a second sooner, had she *just* stayed with him a few minutes longer. All of these *justs* haunted her. It wasn't the powers that frightened her the most, it was what they could *do* if used incorrectly. Verne still regretted having brought them up at all, as Edith's face changed to a look of sadness and guilt.

"Don't…" her lips quivered as she spoke, "don't bring his powers into this, Verne… please."

Verne furrowed his brow, "You still haven't told him."

All sadness vanished from her face in an instance and she glared at him. "No, Verne, I haven't told my nine-year-old son that he has powers strong enough to kill someone."

The words cut through the atmosphere like a knife, Verne swallowed uncomfortably, "I didn't mean it like that."

She laughed coldly at this.

"Then vhat, exactly, *did* you mean by it?" she said sarcastically.

He remained silent and she rolled her eyes. "I thought so. Did you only ask me to come round in order to discuss my sons powers?" her voice betrayed her weariness.

Verne jumped to attention. "N-no, I asked you because I was worried about you. I thought that you would like some company, that's all."

Deep down, he knew he could not tell Edith the way he felt. She was still recovering from the loss of her husband, after all. She sounded exhausted, presumably because she, too, had not been sleeping well.

"Look, I'm sorry for bringing up Ludwig's-" Verne searched for a word that wasn't directly related to powers, "uh – abnormalities." Edith furrowed her brows. "That's not what I meant!" he apologised hurriedly. Much to his surprise, she laughed.

"Vhy are you apologising to me? I should be apologising to you! I've been awful to you." She sunk down in her chair and put her head into her hands. "I'm sorry, Verne. I have just been feeling so scared recently."

"The feeling is mutual." Verne replied, the fear of Silas' return weighing heavily on his mind, "But in times like this we must simply remain calm, otherwise we can't do anything. Fear is a dangerous weapon and one that Silas uses to his advantage. He's got us beaten in the power department but we can still win ourselves a small victory by refusing to be afraid of him."

She sighed, "It's not just Silas himself I fear, it's vhat he could do to Ludwig. He's already told me he wants to kill him. He has already tried once and because Luddy survived he'll want to torture him for it instead of just killing him off. Silas likes nothing better than vatching others suffer, and to think vhat he could do the Ludwig…" she stopped and began to cry. "It's so hard, Verne, so hard to think about vhat could happen."

Verne struggled to find the right words to say. "I think, Edith, that we

are getting a little ahead of ourselves, we don't know for sure that Silas isn't injured after the fight, after all he fell a long way before he hit that lake so it wouldn't amaze me if he had some broken bones. Muak is convinced that one of his gang members led Silas down a wrong path and he reckons that with enough time they may be able to trap him, if they can stay that crucial step ahead of him, which I genuinely believe they can. The Pink Shells aren't like other gangs, you know. They actually think before they do something, and if something needs to be done, they get it done, no matter the cost. Trust me on this, we couldn't have found better allies."

Edith's sobs had abated, "Are the rumours about Muak true?"

Verne looked perplexed, "What rumours?"

"Vell… I've never really met him before, so I don't know for sure, but some Koopas have been saying that the reason he moved here was to escape from the authorities…" she paused.

"And?" Verne implored.

"They're saying that he murdered his wife." Edith wasted no time getting to the point. In all honesty she was expecting him laugh it off. He didn't.

"That's not exactly what happened, he wasn't entirely responsible for her death."

"Verne." Edith began in a stern voice. "I hope you don't mean to tell me that we are living next to a murderer."

"He's not a murderer. He was only partly responsible for her death. Kaiya was her name. Edith," his stern tone matched her own, "I am telling you this in the belief that you will not repeat it to anyone else. Especially Roy, his father isn't ready to tell him that his mother is dead."

Edith gasped, "That poor boy doesn't know vhat happened to his mother-" she looked at Verne, solemn-faced and quickly answered: "Of course I von't say anything, you know me Verne, I listen to rumours, but I don't spread them."

His face hardened, "I wish that what I am about to tell you was just a rumour. Alas, it is not."

Edith could instinctively feel that her outlook would be the same as his and reclined back in her armchair, her claws gripping the stem of a wine glass that thus far remained untouched. It felt like she was a young girl who was being read a story, only this time the story was morbid and not fiction.

"It all started a couple of years ago, when Kaiya was on holiday with Muak and Roy, mind you that not all of this could be accurate, I only have Muak's side of the story. They were staying in a secret retreat somewhere on the outskirts of Easton Kingdom that was hidden from human view, as their tolerance to our race does not extend particularly far. A couple of days into their trip, Muak and Kaiya decided to have a day trip together and dropped Roy off at the resorts day-care centre, after they'd done this they travelled to Shifting Sand Land via a pipe with the hopes of going inside the pyramid. Obviously, that pyramid is now closed to all visitors and that actually came as a result of these two's journey that day. They both managed to sneak inside somehow and given how hefty Muak is and how tall Kaiya was, that in itself was a miracle."

Edith listened to this with rapt attention. She was already intrigued by Kaiya, who was still a big question mark in her mind. Muak she had met the previous night, as he had accompanied Roy to drop off his things at her home and he had seemed distant. She had noticed how Roy acted as though he wasn't there and would only speak to his father if he was asked a question, it was as though the two of them were estranged. She tuned back into what Verne was saying.

"Upon arriving at the pyramid, they went about exploring. This was something that they both had in common and it was how they both met, Muak has travelled the world to keep his gang safe on missions and Kaiya was on a pilgrimage with some friends to learn all about other kingdoms and cultures, but, I digress. Anyway, whilst they were exploring the inside of this pyramid, Kaiya found a passage which urged passers-by to keep out, as it had to be checked to make sure it was safe before the public could be let in to see what was on the other side." Verne stopped and looked her in the eyes for a moment.

"I think that you already know where this is going. Well, whatever you're thinking you are most likely correct in your assumption. Despite both of them being keen explorers, Kaiya was always more of a rulebreaker than her husband. She figured that as they had already trespassed by entering the pyramid, nothing should prohibit them from checking out the passageway either. He was powerless to stop her as she strode through the entrance and felt obliged to follow her in case there was trouble. There was no trouble, no renovations being done, nothing, just a small empty room with a single pipe inside of it, a sign next to it read: **Danger! Keep out!** Kaiya apparently laughed this off. 'That's what they always say to keep people from entering, there's probably not even anything down there!' and took off. Muak was hesitant to follow her, but after a few minutes of psyching himself up for it, leapt down after her."

Verne's expression became darker. "He arrived in a room that was a larger version of the one he had just left. The floor was paved with sandstone bricks and just ahead of him was Kaiya, staring at a pile of bricks in the middle of the room. He called out to her but she didn't acknowledge him or move in any way but remained transfixed by something that he couldn't see. He walked over to her and put his hand on her shoulder. After a while, she turned around to face him, he was shocked to see a soulless and blank stare meet his eyes, as though it were not her, but someone else that stared at him." He paused again. "What happened next is a little… odd. I don't know how much of it to believe because there are some truly weird and wonderful creatures inhabiting the worlds around us, but this one was weirder than most, it must be said, so try and bear with me."

He looked up at Edith, who nodded her approval for him to continue. She was still trying to comprehend what she had heard already, but it would take time for it all to sink in.

"Muak told me that the ground started to shake and the pile of rocks in the middle of the room became animated all of a sudden and assembled to form a giant pair of *hands* . Kaiya instantly jumped back to life and looked terrified, she turned back to Muak and yelled at him to run. As they hurtled back towards the pipe, the ground crumbled at their feet whilst a deep and rumbly voice growled at them from the darkness, demanding to know who had disturbed its

slumber. Just before the ground could give way, they jumped down the pipe and arrived back in the other room. Kaiya had lost the distant look in her eyes and appeared to be more or less herself again but was visibly shaken from what had just occurred. As soon as they had arrived back, the pipe that they had used sunk into the ground and vanished. It must have been quite loud as it alerted the pyramid guards, a group of Shy-Guys, who went to investigate the racket. Muak grabbed hold of Kaiya, who was still in a state of delirium, and pelted out of the pyramid at full speed, not stopping until they got back to their resort. He took Kaiya to the infirmary but the doctor could find nothing wrong with her and was more worried about him, as he had run through the desert at full speed in the middle of the day whilst carrying his wife on his back. He simply told them not to explore places that were out of bounds again any time soon. The rest of the trip went on without incident, from what I can tell, and Muak relaxed. Little did he know that his troubles were far from over…"

"Oooh, look at the stars!" Wendy cried, pointing up at the thousands of silver lights that danced in the midnight blue of the sky.

"I know, there are so many. I suppose that you don't see them all in town due to the light pollution." Ludwig responded, placing some logs and dried leaves in a pile to create a fire.

"Why do we need streetlights when we have all these stars?" she groaned, "You're so lucky to live here Ludwig, I'd love to see the sky like this every night!"

"Man I love this time a' night," Roy exhaled, "Makes ya forget 'bout everything and feel like anythin' is possible."

Ludwig stopped for a moment, amazed as the sentimentality of Roy's words, he looked up to the stars again and smiled to himself. The last time he had sat out on a night like this was with his father the night before he died. "Yeah, I guess it does." He said wistfully.

Roy turned to look at him, "Ya feelin' alright, Lutz?"

"Ja, I vas just thinking about my father. The last time I stargazed vas vith him."

Wendy looked at him sympathetically, and Roy made a mental note to tread carefully with his words.

"Ya know… and I'm only ever gonna tell you guys this… sometimes I kinda like to talk to the stars."

They both turned to look at him.

"When my mom left… I didn't really have anyone to talk to. My dad has always been distant but since she left he's been worse, we never have proper conversations but I wish we did because I can tell that mom leaving has hurt him as much as it hurt me…" Roy developed a sad aura, Ludwig could tell this, even though he couldn't see his eyes. "It's weird," he continued, "it felt like she'd died… still feels like she's died. I don't think she ever told pops where she went but he told me a couple of weeks after she had left that she was happy, but I could tell by lookin' at his eyes that he was devastated. He looked so tired… but I have you guys now, you're the first real friends I've ever had. Anyway, like I said, after mom left, I didn't have anyone to talk to, so instead I used to sit up at night and talk to the stars, pretending that she was listening to me, wherever she was. I still do it occasionally and I think it really helped me through those dark times. I know that our losses ain't the same, Lutz, but sometimes it can help a little bit. In my opinion, our lost loved ones are closer than we think, we just need to look to the stars. I think that ever star is a Koopa soul, lighting up the path of life for us." Roy concluded.

"Wow." Wendy said, eyes now fixed firmly on the sky, "So there's a bunch of dead people watching us? I don't see anyone."

Roy laughed, "Not quite, they aren't physically there, which is why you can't see them, but their souls are. Their souls are the part of them that's like a star."

Wendy still seemed baffled and proceeded to ask where her soul was, when told that it was somewhere in her body, she then became extremely confused and wondered why, if her soul was inside her

she wasn't glowing. Ludwig interjected at some point with, "Isn't it strange to be looking up at something that happened thousands of years ago?", as Wendy's limited understanding of abstract concepts wasn't going to change anytime soon, but that question left Roy in bewilderment also, neither of them having studied the life cycle of stars as Ludwig had recently done.

Ludwig struck his claw against a piece of flint in order to start a fire. Having accomplished in starting it, he placed some large rocks around the perimeter to ensure that the flames could not spread and placed a saucepan of milk on top of a wire rack so that it could heat up. Whilst they waited, Wendy caught sight of the small wood beside the house and was adamant that they should check it out. Neither Roy nor Ludwig was very keen to do so, but neither wanted to be called afraid, so they consented to go, but only for five minutes. Wendy grabbed hold of her torch and ran off, with the others following her somewhat reluctantly.

"I'm not afraid of the dark, y'know." Roy told Ludwig "Just don't want Wendy getting lost or hurt… what's wrong with a little bit of dark, right?" he said in a forced tone.

"Couldn't agree with you more." Ludwig replied, gripping his torch, "Nothing to be afraid of."

"Once the family arrived back home, Kaiya began acting very strangely again."

Edith had leant forward in her chair, wine glass still untouched, eyes glued to Verne as he went on with the story.

"It was slight things at first: getting up in the middle of the night and wandering around the house, as if she were looking for something, standing over Roy in the middle of the night and watching him as he slept, strange rituals that seemingly came out of nowhere. The straw that broke the camel's back was when she got up one night and Muak heard her rummaging through the cutlery draw, then come back upstairs again. Apparently, she stood and watched him for over an hour, knife in hand, then went back to bed. Muak was awake the

whole time, poised to grab her if she made a move, but she didn't. He confronted her the next morning, but she could not remember anything. She looked terrified by what he told her and went to go and see a doctor the next day, but to no avail. He suggested some medications for sleepwalking, but they didn't work, and Muak was up all night every night making sure that she was safe and didn't try to hurt anyone. The harmless sleepwalking, if you can call it that, changed after a fortnight and Kaiya became more aggressive, trying to hurt both Muak and Roy on numerous occasions. It got to the point where Kaiya had to be restrained in a room with the door locked. Muak was desperate and contacted Kamek, whom he met through an alliance from years ago. Kamek studied Kaiya and confirmed that she was possessed by a spirit. What kind of spirit, he could not tell, but it was very powerful and as though this wasn't enough of a shock for Muak, he was then told by Kamek that the spirit had become extra powerful due to Kaiya herself, as she harboured magical powers that she never even knew about. There was nothing Kamek could do to reassure him, as the spirit was sending Kaiya on a path to self-destruction. He even offered to cast a spell that would allow Kaiya to pass on in relative peace. Muak asked if he could have some time to think it over…" Verne choked slightly. "I'm sorry, Edith… it's just so hard to imagine what they went through. This next bit is hard to listen to. Kamek stayed over that night to give Muak some time to decide. Muak sat with Kaiya through the night, telling her that he loved her very much and that he was sorry for what had happened. Just before the morning broke, Kaiya returned to her senses once more and begged Muak to put an end to their suffering. She told him that it broke her heart that she wouldn't be able to see Roy grow up and grow old together with her husband, but she had to go, or else she would hurt them. Muak understood this and summoned Kamek a few minutes later, by the time that he came downstairs the spirit was controlling her once again and she was hissing at them the whole time. Kamek administered a strong spell and…" Verne stopped for a moment, "and Kaiya passed away a few minutes later, peaceful as anything. Muak quickly arranged for a funeral but never let Roy know what had happened, he was too afraid of what his son would think of him for giving Kamek permission to kill his mother. So, he told him that she had moved away and would not be keeping in touch. There has been a rift between them ever since. Muak has devoted himself to

his gang in the hopes of being able to one day forgive himself and as far as I am aware, Roy still believes his mother is alive, but antagonizes his father." With that, Verne concluded the story and wiped away a tear.

"That's awful." Edith sobbed, "Poor Roy… to not have a mother and only a distant father… how has he been coping."

"Quite frankly, I don't think he was." Verne replied, "But then he met your son. I can see a new lease of life in him now."

"I'll keep an eye on him, he's a velcome guest and can come around at any time." Edith vowed, "But I von't tell him vhat happened Verne, I promise. That's his father's job."

"Thank you, Edith. I am glad you understand. It makes me feel much better having shared that horrible tale with you." Verne confided. "If it is not too much to ask, I have something else that I would like to share with you."

"Oh, and vhat's that?" she replied.

Verne looked at her seriously, it was now or never. "I like you Edith, I like you a lot. I understand that it may be too soon to be asking you, but would you ever consider… could you ever love me?"

The question felt awkward and unnatural to Verne, he looked eagerly at Edith's face, but knew instantly that he was going to be let down in a friendly manner.

"Oh, Verne. How long have you felt like this?" she asked, sympathy in her eyes. He stared down at the ground.

"Since the day I first laid eyes on you. I know that I'm older than you, and you've got Ludwig to think about as well, I was only wondering."

"I like you too Verne. Our age difference means nothing to me and I am sure that vith time Ludwig vould velcome you into the family, but right now… it's just too soon for me to be moving on."

Verne nodded, "Thank you."

"It's alright. Please don't let this ruin our friendship. You are always velcome to visit and ve vill velcome you with open arms. Just give me some time before we consider taking things any further than friendship."

"Vendy! Vendy, Vhere are you?" Ludwig hollered. He and Roy were standing in a small clearing looking for Wendy, who was hiding somewhere nearby as they could hear her giggling.

"C-c'mon Wendy, let's go back to the fire." Roy urged rather than suggested.

"Why, are you scared?" she retorted.

"N-no, j-just cold." He lied.

"Cold? It's seventeen degrees! And you're cold blooded!" Ludwig joked, trying to mask his own fear. The two of them looked like complete goons, traipsing about the forest in their pyjamas.

"Getting warmer." They heard Wendy call and proceeded to follow her voice. "Warmer… warmer… argh!" she shrieked.

Both boys froze, white with fear. "W-w-what's wrong?!" Roy called.

"It's ok, I just tripped on a tree root." Wendy replied, emerging from behind a large tree right in front of them. "You two suck at hide and seek!" she laughed.

"Alright, alright, I was scared, I admit it. Now can we please, *please* go back!" Roy begged.

"Sure thing scaredy cat, let's go." Wendy led the way back.

As they wandered back a rustling sound caught Ludwig's attention. He stopped and shone his torch around them but could see nothing.

Roy also stopped, "Lutz, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, I heard rustling, but it vas probably just a small animal,

there are hundreds in this wood." He picked up his pace to join Roy, Wendy wandered a little further ahead of them. All of a sudden, their three torches turned off, blanketing them in an inky black cloak of night.

"Oh, naw" Ludwig heard Roy say.

"It's ok." Ludwig told him, knowing full well that it was anything but.

A loud roar echoed around the woods and Roy grabbed hold of Ludwig, hugging him for dear life.

"Vendy." Ludwig said, as calmly as he could, trying to take the leaders initiative as the oldest of the group. "I need you to follow my voice. I don't know quite vhat we're dealing vith here."

"O-okay." came her response.

There was heavy rustling now, and Ludwig held no doubt at all that they were being pursued by something, but he was determined not to let his fear get the better of him.

Wendy let out a piercing scream, accompanied by the same roar that they had just heard. All of a sudden, their torches came back to life, and the stone on Ludwig's necklace glowed a strong bright blue. He looked at it confusedly, was it trying to tell him something again?

In front of them was an enormous piranha plant that had caught Wendy by her leg and was dangling her upside down. But this was no ordinary piranha plant, it was a stalking one, as it was not restricted by a pot and could walk around.

As soon as he saw Wendy, Roy seemed to forget that he had ever been scared and marched toward the plant, rock in hand.

"Roy, no! Don't throw it! You'll make it angry if you-"

Roy lobbed the rock at the plants head. It let out a piercing scream and, to Ludwig's surprise, dropped Wendy onto the ground. Roy grabbed hold of her and slung her onto his back.

"Go back to the house!" Ludwig yelled.

"We're not leaving you, Lutz!" Roy yelled.

"You are in no position to argue!" he retorted.

Roy looked at the piranha plant, which had shaken off its injury and was staring intently at Ludwig. It stretched its long neck to get at him, but a snap made it turn back to Roy, who had stood on the worlds loudest twig. He looked sheepishly up at the plant. "Uh, hey." he said.

The plant roared and lunged towards Roy, who let out a scream even shriller than Wendy's.

Ludwig felt a hot sensation flood through his veins. The inside of his chest felt white with heat and for a moment, everything seemed to slow down. The necklace glowed brighter and brighter. Ludwig listened to it. *Breathe,* it said to him, *breath out the heat.* Ludwig took a deep breath and, with all his strength, let out a mighty exhale. A huge orange fireball flew out of his mouth and barrelled towards the plant, hitting its head and setting it alight. The sound it made as is burnt was excruciating to listen to, like claws on a blackboard, but Ludwig felt no sympathy for the thing. This, he thought to himself, was revenge. Then, he realised the smoke pouring out of his nostrils and mouth and gasped, letting cool air flow through them, stopping the smoke. He gagged, the taste of the stuff was vile!

He felt Roy put a hand on his shoulder and felt his insides squirm, what were they going to think of him? He felt faint from shock and fear, bracing himself for what his friends would say.

"Wow, Lutz. I didn't even think of that! I should have just tried lighting something on fire too!" Roy exclaimed.

Ludwig recovered sufficiently enough to speak, "Vhat do you mean?"

"You just threw a match at it, didn't you?"

"Oh- yes, a match. I did." Ludwig felt a cool wave of relief wash over him. Roy hadn't seen him shoot the fireball and neither had Wendy, who had her face buried in Roy's shoulder. It was a feeble lie,

however. No match could have inflicted such damage from such a distance, he thought as he looked at the ashes of the plant.

"How's Vendy?"

"Shaken but unscathed." Roy craned his neck to look at her. "Don't think I'll throw a rock at a piranha plant again any time soon."

Ludwig laughed, "I certainly wouldn't advise it. I am curious, though. How did that plant get onto the island in the first place? They aren't a native species and Stalking piranha plants are especially rare."

"I think I can answer that for you." Roy announced, "Havin' travelled so much you see quite a bit and I reckon that this one was part of a shipment. Piranha plants are commonly bred for security purposes and I reckon whoever ordered this one had a ton of money, because you're right, stalking piranha plants are very rare. Either that or they were importing one illegally, that happens a lot too. The ship it came in on was probably bein' managed by Goombas. Their lack of security and self-awareness is really awe-inspiring."

"Do you think there are any more?" Ludwig asked, Roy's knowledge about this subject fascinated him.

"Doubt it. These kind tend to hunt alone so I can't know for sure, but they are generally stored in separate crates. This one probably had a faulty lock and figured out how to pick it, they're surprisingly smart for plants and I am amazed, given that, that Goombas are allowed any part in chauffeuring them. You're just asking for trouble. I wouldn't worry, Lutz, like ya said, the island isn't their natural home and I haven't seen any sweetgrass here, which forms a huge part of their diet, cuz they're omnivores, so they couldn't survive long even if there were more."

Ludwig was amazed by what he was hearing. "Roy, you are always telling me that you are not clever but listen to yourself. Vhat you have just told me is amazing! You know so much about these plants. I think that, vhen you are older, you should consider pursuing a career in Biology or Environmental Studies. That type of vork could benefit from having someone like you around."

Roy beamed, praise from Ludwig was high praise indeed. "Thanks Lutz, I'm glad you think that, and who knows, maybe one day I will."

Wendy, who had now recovered conscience, was keen to get back and have hot chocolate. Apart from a bruise on her leg and being slightly jolted by the experience, she was her usual self and Ludwig made sure to limit the amount of marshmallows she had to avoid her bouncing off the walls at bedtime, which was fast approaching.

After they had finished their drinks, Ludwig extinguished the fire and ushered everyone inside so that he could wash up whilst they went upstairs and got ready for bed. When he arrived upstairs, he was amazed to find both Wendy and Roy out for the count. He climbed into his bed but just before he could lay down, he heard his mother open the front door and tottered downstairs to go and see her.

She looked very tired, he thought as he approached her. She had visible bags under her eyes and something about her demeanour seemed off. He wrapped his arms around her waist and she pulled him in for a hug, ruffling his hair.

"Did you have a nice time at Verne's house?" he asked her.

"Yes, my little prince. How are your friends, have you had a nice time?"

"They're already asleep, but yes, it has been vonderful, thank you. Can I get you a hot drink?"

"No, don't vorry Luddy. You go upstairs and go to bed as vell, you look tired."

"So do you."

Edith sighed, "Yes, I've realised. You go upstairs, I'll not be far behind you."

"Ok," Ludwig kissed her goodnight and turned to go upstairs but stopped suddenly. "Mother?" he asked.

"Vhat is it, Luddy?"

"Is it possible for Koopas to breathe fire?"

She gave him a funny look and he rooted around for an excuse, "I heard someone talking about it today, I knew it wasn't possible. I shouldn't have listened in-"

"It's possible." came her calm response, "It's rare, but it's possible."

"Oh, okay. Thank you." Ludwig turned to go again, "Goodnight, mother."

"Goodnight, Ludwig."

She waited until his footsteps had retreated to sink forward at the table and put her head in her hands. Nobody had talked about breathing fire in school today, his uncertain tone made it clear that it was a lie. Something had happened to make Ludwig ask that question, but she doubted that he would ever say what that something was. She put a hand to her chest and could feel the heat of a fire burning. Why, oh why had she still not told him, sooner or later he was going to find out for himself and what would she do then? She turned to look out of the kitchen window and called out in her mind to Johann, close but so far away. 'What would you do, Johann? If you were here, what would you do?'

"Lutz?" Roy whispered as Ludwig climbed back into bed.

"Yeah?" he replied, snuggling down under the covers.

"Are ya alright? You've been acting a little… odd since the whole piranha plant incident."

"I'm only tired. That thing really gave me a scare."

"Oh, alright then."

"Hey, Roy."

"Yeah, Lutz?"

"Would you still vant to be my friend if I was… a bit different."

He heard Roy sit up in his sleeping bag, "Whaddya mean?"

"Say if I was capable of something, like magic or something else out of the ordinary. Vould you still want to be friends with me?"

Roy snorted with laughter, "You're weird, Lutz, did you know that?"

This made Ludwig feel embarrassed, he could feel his face burning.

"Yeah – I know – I just vondered." He stammered.

"Of course I'd still like you! No amount of magic can ever make me feel anything different. Wendy would feel the same way if she was awake" Roy reassured.

The embarrassment subsided and Ludwig felt himself breathe a sigh of relief. It was good to have such amazing friends by his side. It was a wonder he had survived without them for so long. He and Roy exchanged 'Goodnights' and the latter quickly fell asleep, but Ludwig remained sitting upright and gazing out of his window at the stars. In reality he was in his bedroom on Glass Island, but in his imagination, he was speaking with his father as the two of them soared through the skies on wings of stardust. He closed his eyes and smiled, unaware that hiding in another world, Silas slammed his hand down, another attempt on Ludwig's life failed.

Author's Notes: Wow! I am so happy I got this published today. It is my birthday and I have been trying hard to get this chapter done so it would feel extra special when I published it! As I write this note my Ludwig plush is staring at me, he is the angriest looking plush that I have ever owned!

Thank you so much to everyone who has read this fanfiction so far! I really appreciate the time that you have taken to do so. Shoutout to StarlitDuck and Amethyst Goldenwind for reviewing chapter three. Thank you to LePurpleJoy and CobaltWizard for following and favouriting the story and another thank you to FierySpyro and Richmountain112 for favouriting it, your support means a lot me!

I would also like to take a moment to address something from a

review I received a while ago concerning the different languages that are present in the story. I am so sorry that I didn't address it sooner, but here goes. I have only played a few of the Mario games but what has always stood out to me is when you interact with different species, say, Goombas, Shy Guys and Koopas, and they all make different noises (The only game I have played all the way through is Super Mario 64 DS, so this may not be the case in all of the games). I took this to mean that the different noises were all different languages. I presume that English, Italian and Japanese are also languages in the Mario universe, given how they tie in with the main character, but I could be wrong. I added German as a language because Ludwig allegedly has a Germanic accent and I thought that it would be fitting if he could speak the language as well. I hope this helps with the language side of things :)

That's all for this chapter, the next one is going to be very short so I hope to have it up in a day or so. See you again soon!

Back to School

Chapter Five

That summer was the best that Ludwig, Wendy and Roy had ever had. Over its course they had several wonderful adventures together and were barely ever separated for its duration. Ludwig secretly hoped that those long summer days would never end, despite his love for learning, nothing compared to the marvellous times that he was having with his newfound friends. It felt like everything they did together was making up for all those lonely years that he had spent studying. The world had gone from monochrome to rainbow in the space of a few short weeks.

They did so many exciting things that summer, Wendy's grandfather took the three of them out for a trip on his boat so that they could see Glass Falls, located on the West side of the island that was only accessible by boat. They held numerous picnics at various beauty spots around the island, started a book club and even went on a huge hike around the island (Ludwig didn't like this as much).

Alas, the days began to shorten and the leaves on the trees gave way to reddish and orange hues which signalled the beginning of autumn. In a few weeks they would begin to fall and the ground would become adorned with a fine golden carpet.

Ludwig took a deep breath as he stepped outside. The air was cooler, and his breath misted as he exhaled. Mist hung around the pine trees behind the house and the sun was shrouded in its haze on the horizon, making the sky a brilliant plethora of colours, from mauve to lilac to pink. He looked at the clock in the kitchen, it was only 5:30, he had been awoken by yet another dream. This one had not been scary, it had just been… odd, but he couldn't remember why. Dreams were fleeting things and they never hung around you for long, all you were left with upon waking were the fragments of something bigger. Ludwig, despite knowing that the dream had not been frightening, felt for some inexplicable reason a feeling of dread crawling up his spine. It was trying to tell him something, he just

knew it, never had he been more certain of something in his entire life.

From her bedroom window, Edith watched her son. She had hardly seen him all summer as he had been busy with his friends and she hadn't wanted to dampen his mood with the inevitable conversation that she was going to have with him at some point. For now, she still let him be. Verne had offered to be an umpire during their conversation and Edith was tempted to take him up on his offer, she just couldn't bear having it with him alone. Besides, whilst Ludwig had been going out on adventures with his friends, Edith had been seeing Verne much more regularly, almost every day in fact. Word on the island was that the mayor would go and see Edith at every available moment he had and she knew that, sooner or later, the rumours circulating about their relationship would become the truth, as she enjoyed seeing him more every time he visited. Ludwig, as far as she was aware, did not know about these rumours, but that was far easier for her to talk to him about than his magical capabilities. He was very mature for a nine-year old, she knew that for a fact. Yet there was something beneath the surface of her son's character that gave the impression of fragility, like his mind would be easily susceptible to the darkness, or Silas's shadow magic, if he were afraid, so she didn't want to tell him before it was time.

But time was quickly wearing away.

The walk to school was a cold one, and Ludwig was grateful about his short stature for once, as he wasn't required to buy a new coat for the winter, his old one was still perfectly adequate. Johann had brought it for him a couple of years ago and it had been enormous when Ludwig had first worn it, looking like more of a dress than a coat. It was lined with eiderdown which meant that it was fluffy, light and very warm. Glass Island didn't stay warm for very long, they had the golden summers and then the weather would suddenly revert to crisp and chill, then to freezing as if someone were constantly flicking a switch between hot and cold.

In some ways, the walk to school was more enjoyable to Ludwig in the colder months, the coolness made everything around him

appear sharper. So far, most of his musical compositions were based off of his journeys to school. One day he hoped to publish them and go on a tour of the worlds conducting an orchestra to his symphonies. For now, though, he was content with studying hard to become an architect and left his music to one side as a hobby.

He met Roy and Wendy by the gates and they wandered inside the school together but were soon separated again in order to go to their new form rooms. Ludwig's new form room was an art room and he instantly disliked it upon arriving as it felt like he had arrived in Sherbet Land it was so cold. He shivered and pulled his coat tighter around him. He took a seat as near to the front of the room as he could and pulled out his notebook. He took out a pencil and began to write out a short poem about the island. He hadn't gotten far when someone grabbed hold of the notebook and held it above his head, just out of reach. Ludwig was not surprised to see who it was.

"Elliot, don't you have anything better to do?" he asked the older boy, amazed at the authority in his own voice.

"Nothing more fun than taunting you, Toothwig."

Ludwig tried to restrain himself, but he had dealt with these insults for far too long.

"Oh dear, still vith the silly names I see. Veren't seven veeks enough to come up vith something more original?"

Elliot's expression darkened, "Do you know who you're talking to?"

"I'm talking to you, you cantankerous git." Ludwig said sharply, shocked at his choice of words, but not altogether disappointed by them either.

Elliot threw the notebook to the ground, "That's it, you're in for it now Ludwig."

Ludwig glanced around, he could hear footsteps approaching and they were heavy, meaning that a teacher was about to arrive, he looked Elliot right in the eyes and grinned.

"Go on then, Elliot, big Koopa that you are. Come at me."

Elliot let out a roar and charged towards him, arms outstretched. Ludwig waited until he was almost in his grasp before taking a step back. Elliot tried to slam on the brakes but went flying into the art display boards behind Ludwig with a humungous crash. Ludwig grabbed his notebook and leapt back into his seat just in time. The teacher who entered the room was possibly the one that everyone feared the most, Mr. Grimm, the deputy headmaster.

" *What* is going on in here – Elliot!" he practically screamed at Elliot, who was sprawled on top of a mound of boards and paintings. " *Those were exam pieces and you've gone and destroyed them you reckless, careless boy!"*

Ludwig smiled to himself. Everyone was now staring amusedly at Elliot and Ludwig could hear a few giggles. Elliot got back on his feet and stammered "S-Sorry sir, but L-Ludwig made me do it."

"Don't you dare try and drag Ludwig into this, young man. He would never do such a thing, would you?" Grimm turned to look at Ludwig and Ludwig put on a big and saccharine grin.

"No sir, I vould never be so careless."

Elliot was practically fuming by now. Ludwig was amazed that there was not steam coming out of his ears. He knew he should be frightened of Elliot as now he would want payback, but he wasn't anymore. Now he had the support of his friends, Elliot's taunts were worthless., Ludwig was not afraid to face him now.

"You could learn from him, Elliot." Grimm said approvingly, "If you put as much time into your studies as young Ludwig does, you could do great things. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case last year and I am forced to give you this." Ludwig had only just realised the pile of white envelopes stacked in Grimm's arms and he held one out to Elliot. "I have all of your exam results here; I was just on my way to distribute them."

There was a unified groan from the form group, but at his words, Ludwig sat up straighter, eager to see how he had done, although he pretty much already knew. Apart from Art and Physical Education, Ludwig was certain he had done very well in his exams.

The same could not be said for Elliot, whose face had turned as red as the marker used on his envelope to write: **POOR. RESITS REQUIRED.**

Grimm gave Elliot a look of severe distaste and added "Detention. My office. Lunchtime." before walking over to Ludwig and handing him his envelope and saying in a low whisper, "Well done, young man! Top of the year with your results again, truly remarkable! But still not a fan of sports, I see."

Ludwig shook his head. Grimm ruffled his hair, "Never mind that though, your mother is going to be very proud of you!" He gave him another smile before moving on to the rest of the class.

Despite the fact that he had a reputation for being feared, Grimm had a soft spot for Ludwig, with his eagerness to learn and this had been amplified after his father's death, after which he had always looked out for Ludwig and been very protective of him. Ludwig had the unfortunate reputation of being a teacher's pet at school, for obvious reasons and that was why so many of his classmates, with Elliot in particular, turned against him. It was not just the results that Ludwig achieved that made his teachers dote on him, it was his sweet, polite demeanour and seriousness that was so severe for a young Koopa that it was almost funny.

Ludwig gently opened the envelope and beheld his results:

Name: **Ludwig Von Koopa** Form: **8A**

Examiner's Note: Grades are as follows: A+ (Highest grade, Amazing), A (Amazing), O (Outstanding), E (Excellent), C (Could be better), P (Poor), F (Failed), U (Ungraded).

Art: **E**

Biology: **A**

Chemistry: **A+**

English Literature: **A+**

English Language: **A+**

Further Mathematics: **A**

Languages of choice (French, Goomba): **A+, O**

Mathematics: **A+**

Music: **A+ (With extra credit for the symphony that was attached.)**

Physics: **A+**

Physical Education: **C (Mr. Reynolds would like to remind Mr. Von Koopa that in order to play dodgeball, you must try to catch the ball and not literally dodge it.)**

Reading: **A+ (The school librarian would like to congratulate Ludwig for managing to read every book in the library.)**

Note from the headmaster:

Ludwig has, as always, shown true excellence in his ability to learn. He has gone out of his way to prove how strong his capabilities are by taking two languages, instead of the usual one and by selecting to take further maths in addition to mathematics. Every teacher I conversed with was positive about his attitude to learning, quality of home studies and attention in class, all things that our school strives to get its students to attain. It would be appreciated if he would join in more with class discussions and group projects in order to expand his social skills, as this still appears to be an issue with him. He is still incredibly young and that lack of sociability is understandable, but it is important to make friends in your classes as that makes the learning process far more enjoyable. If Ludwig is having any issues, he is more than welcome to come and see either myself or the deputy head Mr Grimm, who I understand to be very fond of him and eager to help. As always, I offer you my congratulations, Ludwig, you are a wonderful student and I expect to see some more wonderful results in this upcoming year (maybe even in Physical Education!)

With best wishes for the new school year,

Frederick Rodgers (Headmaster of Pine Grove School).

Ludwig smiled internally; he had achieved excellent grades. Some could admittedly be better and he scolded himself for having not revised linear algebra more scrupulously. But still, an E in art was surprisingly good going. He had chosen to base his final piece for the exam on airships and had created a picture of one by cutting up old articles about airships and creating a collage in the shape of one. It was by no means a perfect work of art, but it was greatly ambitious and he felt that it had paid off. He had even scraped by in PE, what more could he ask for?

"This isn't over, Toothy. When they aren't around, I'll get you." Elliot murmured maliciously under his breath.

Ludwig froze. For a moment Elliot had ceased to exist as he had been so delighted with his results. The confidence he had recently felt evaporated at his words. *When who wasn't around? His friends? The teachers? Both?* The feeling of threat was now very real to Ludwig and he now felt scared but who could he tell? He didn't want Roy getting into trouble because of him and he didn't want Wendy to get worried. If he told the teachers or his mother Elliot would get into more trouble and that would only make him madder. Ludwig sighed. His only option, he thought to himself, was to ensure that he was never alone. And that was what he did for the rest of the day. At break time and lunchtime, he hung around Roy and Wendy like the plague until the last possible moment and when they walked home, Ludwig only separated from the group when he absolutely had to.

"Are ya sure you're all right, Lutz? Ya been acting kinda odd." Roy observed, as he turned to continue down another path with Wendy.

"I'm fine, I'm fine!" Ludwig replied, unconvincingly, "I'm just really happy to see you guys!"

Roy gave him a look, "You've seen us pretty much every day all summer…"

Ludwig stared at him "I know."

They stared at each other for a while before the awkwardness of the situation became too much for Roy to bear and he backed off.

"Ok… see ya tomorrow then, Lutz."

"See you, Roy."

Ludwig waited until they had vanished into the trees before legging it back to his house, all the while checking to make sure that he wasn't being pursued. He reached the front door and slammed it shut behind him. Edith was not in, a note on the kitchen table told Ludwig that she had been invited out to dinner that evening by Verne. Ludwig was happy that his mother was seeing people more regularly now, for a few months she had almost retreated inside herself completely, but Verne had kept an eye on her and Ludwig. *He is such a good friend,* Ludwig thought to himself, *almost as good as mine!*

He was now faced with what could only be described as a moral dilemma. He had been waiting for an opportunity to be able to practice breathing fire – if he could manage it again. He had actually found a book in the family library that turned out to be a study on fire breathing Koopa's who were referred to in the book as being 'Children of Dragons' or, simply, 'Dragon-Koopas'.

Apparently, these so-called Dragon-Koopas had been around for centuries and were thought to have originated when a Koopa who was called, ironically, Magma, had ingested a Fire Flower that had been hit by a falling star, thus, altering their anatomy so that they could breathe fire. Magma was believed to be one of the rulers of the ancient Koopa Kingdom until an uprising against their unique species killed them off. 'The Great Dragon Koopa Cull', Ludwig shuddered at the name, happened half a millennia ago and was begun by a group of ordinary Koopas who were jealous of the Dragon-Koopas unique ability and falsely placed the blame for everything that was wrong with the world on their shoulders. People actually listened to the rubbish that they came out with and soon, mobs went from house to house ruthlessly murdering suspected Dragon-Koopas, burning them alive or cutting off their heads and placing them on stakes outside the gates of the royal palace - Ludwig nearly vomited when he saw the rather graphic illustrations in the book and decided that that was enough of a history lesson for just then, turning instead to a page that looked at how Dragon-Koopas could breathe fire. The book had clearly been authored by

someone who knew, maybe even was, a Dragon-Koopa. It was very battered and was also one of those rarities that had been written entirely by hand, instead of printed. The writing looked familiar somehow, but Ludwig wasn't sure why because it was cursive and he didn't know anyone that used cursive writing. The only clue as to whom had authored the book were the initials on the red leather cover: *C.V.K* . Apart from that, they were a mystery.

More confusing still was where he had found the book. Ludwig knew that library like the back of his hand and had already memorised all of the books there and they were fairly dusty. This one he had never seen before, or if he had, he didn't remember it and it wasn't the least bit dusty. He had a sneaking suspicion that his mother had intentionally left it there for him to find after he had asked her about the possibilities of fire breathing Koopas.

Ludwig scooped the book up and went outside. Before he closed the door, he called out to the empty house "I am just going out into the garden, mother.", as a precaution to ward off Elliot if he was nearby. If he were, there was not so much as a rustle that would have betrayed his presence and so he took that to mean that the coast was clear.

He placed the book on a large stump in the corner of the garden, a jug of water in his hands. It would have looked very daft to anyone walking by.

He scanned over the contents briefly and surmised that he had to focus on the 'ember' that was inside his chest and channel his anger in order to 'inflame' it. Ludwig thought about this for a moment. He wasn't aggressive in the slightest and *anger* , when had he ever felt *angry* before.

He closed his eyes and tried to imagine a fire inside of his chest picturing the flames growing larger and larger. Something felt like it was happening, as a warm sensation spread from his chest throughout his body and he began to feel hotter and hotter. Then came a very unpleasant smell. Ludwig opened his eyes and shrieked, acrid smoke was pouring out of his nostrils and mouth. He stopped thinking about the flames and threw some water down his neck, making him choke on a wet, ash like substance. After several

minutes of loud and unpleasant hacking, Ludwig recomposed himself and looked determinedly into the trees. He wasn't angry enough, he needed to focus on anger!

Ludwig closed his eyes again. *Come on, anger! You must have felt anger before… anger, anger-*

Elliot's smug face flashed through his mind and he let out a roar, sending a huge fireball, much bigger than the one he had hit the piranha plant with, firing out of his mouth. It hit the ground with a *whoosh* and Ludwig had to quickly lob the jug of water he was holding over it before it could spread. Regaining his breath, he wasn't sure what to think and it ended up being a mixture of both happiness and fear. Happiness that he could do something few others could, and fear that he could potentially hurt someone if he were angry enough. Ludwig felt wiped after performing this impressive feat and decided to retire indoors for the rest of the late afternoon and evening. He did not, therefore, see Elliot hiding amongst the trees as he went inside, nor did he see the grin of pleasure on his face.

Author's Notes: Wow, I actually managed to update twice in a week! This chapter is much shorter than the others and at first I was reluctant to include it as it kind of side-tracks the story, but I figured that it would be nice to include more background information on how Ludwig was as a child, such as his school grades. I like to think that, whilst he is a genius, he isn't perfect. The flaws in his character are something that I hope to slowly develop over the course of the other stories, but I feel like, for now, his grades are a good reflection of this. Nobody is perfect at everything and I have never thought of Ludwig as someone who would enjoy doing P.E very much, that seems more like Roy's kind of thing.

Anyway, on another note, I have a question for you guys. I'm not normally one for using social media but I thought about maybe starting up an account on a platform like Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr, but I wanted to consult you first, so I've opened a poll on my profile. It would mean a lot to me if you took it. I'm not sure exactly what I would post but the account itself would be based on the Koopalings with a particular

emphasis on Ludwig.

Lastly, I have some shoutouts. Thank you so much to StarlitDuck and Amethyst Goldenwind for reviewing the previous chapter, it means the world to me! And thank you also to Richmountain112 for following the story, I appreciate your continued support!

Hopefully, the story is going to start moving forward a bit quicker now that I have established the setting and the first principal characters. Whilst I can't promise when, I am sure that Silas will be making an entrance pretty soon, having been largely absent so far.

I'm not sure when it will be ready, but I'll work hard to ensure I post the next chapter pronto!

Until next time :)

Magical Mayhem

Chapter Six

"Goodbye, mother." Ludwig called out as he opened the front door to begin his journey to school. Upon hearing him, Edith, who had been practically half asleep until that moment, leapt off of the sofa in the library and rushed over to her son, desperate to see him before he left. She pulled him into a tight hug, not wanting to ever let him go because, deep down, she felt that something was wrong, or was going to go wrong, that day. Ludwig seemed perplexed by this rather uncalled for exhibition of affection but decided to just go with it. After what seemed like an eternity, she released him and he strolled up the garden path, ready for a new school day.

She stayed and watched him disappear down the path, into the forest and sighed. There was a little something, a small, persistent niggle that felt as if it were telling her to keep Ludwig at home, but, other than the obvious threat of Silas, she could not think why. Either way, she felt helpless as he wandered off and was immensely pleased to see Verne coming up the path towards her. He nodded at Ludwig as he passed, a gesture that Ludwig reciprocated. Edith marvelled at how a simple nod of the head seemed to count as a conversation for men. Johann had always nodded at other male friends in town and they had nodded back, as if that single nod were equivalent to a thousand words.

Verne smiled upon reaching her and produced a glass vase from behind his back.

"For you." he announced.

"A Lava Lotus! Vhere did you get this?!" Edith marvelled. Verne laughed.

"I know how fond you are of them, so I contacted a friend who lives on the outskirts of the Koopa Kingdom and asked them if they could ship one over to me."

Edith hugged him, "Thank you Verne! This must have cost you an arm and a leg…"

"I can assure you that you are worth any expense, Edith". Verne replied, always the gentleman. His claws lightly brushed her cheek and she blushed.

"Are you going to come inside?" she asked.

"Of course, but I can't stay for long." he warned, following her through to the library where she placed the vase on a table between a sofa and an armchair. He made himself at home on the sofa and after fetching him a coffee, Edith sat down next to him. Verne looked at her.

"You look worried, is something on your mind?" he asked.

Edith sighed, she needed to get her fear off of her chest, so she might as well speak to Verne about it.

"I just have a feeling…a bad feeling, like something bad is about to happen but I'm not sure vhat…"

Verne had a look of understanding in his eyes.

"Are you worrying about Silas again?"

"No, it's not quite like that. At first I thought it was linked to him, and I vorry about that also, but this…this is different. I fear that something is going to go vrong with Ludwig, but I'm not sure vhat. I feel like I should have kept him at home today, but I don't know vhy. I've tried dismissing it as unease but the feeling just von't budge. Something is going to go awry, Verne, I can sense it."

He nodded his head in understanding.

"Everyone has days like that, Edith, but I can assure you that you are most likely getting yourself worked up over nothing. It is a case of mind over matter. Don't let your mind try and trick you into worrying."

Edith forced a smile that she hoped was convincing enough for

Verne.

"Okay, I'll try my best. Thank you, Verne."

Verne grinned back at her.

"You don't need to worry. Besides, last I heard Silas was still on a wild goose chase following Muak's gang. If my projections are correct, he should literally be worlds away from us."

She rested her head on his shoulder and stared out of the library window at Astrowatch, the buildings of which were coated in golden light from the early morning sun.

"I hope so. I really, really do." she breathed.

"Speaking of which, shall we arrange a date for me to visit you when Ludwig is at home? You said that you would appreciate my being there when you tell him about his powers."

"Yes, I suppose ve must. I've put it off for far to long but the thought of having someone there with me takes the pressure off a bit. The original plan vas that me and Johann would have the talk with him when he turned ten, but, as you can see, events have overtaken us somevhat." she sighed.

Verne studied her for a moment.

"You don't have to be afraid anymore." he told her confidently, "This is something that we will face together."

She smiled at him; her kind eyes ablaze.

"Thank you, Verne. I love you."

He reciprocated her warmth. "I love you too."

"Roy. Roy? What's wrong?" Wendy badgered her friend, who was in the midst of another mood swing.

"Vendy, leave him alone. He just vants some time to himself." Ludwig begged her, trying to keep the peace. It was morning break and so far, the day had been a nightmare. Not only had he been worrying about avoiding Elliot left, right and centre, but Roy had been in a foul temper since the moment they met up on the way to school with seemingly no explanation as to why. Ludwig guessed that his father was in town, as that was usually the cause, but he had never been this bad before, he was at least verbal on the other occasions. He hadn't so much as uttered a word to either Ludwig or Wendy and this had seriously bewildered the latter, who was unaware of the fact that he was in a bad mood for a reason and was subsequently getting annoyed with him.

"Vendy, please! Don't make him feel vorse, he just needs a bit of alone time. How about you come over here and I'll read to you."

"No! I want to know what's wrong with him!" Wendy protested as Ludwig tried to gently lead her away.

Excellent . He thought to himself. Normally Wendy was pretty easily bribed with stories but this time she was refusing to budge. Ludwig was about to speak again but was cut off by a loud and rather pompous voice.

"Ah, Toothy, I've been looking for you."

Ludwig felt his stomach do a somersault and looked up to see Elliot standing a few yards away. A couple of his cronies lurked nearby. Ludwig swallowed uncomfortably. Someone, somewhere, was clearly trying to test his patience, he thought to himself.

"Who're you, and why are you calling Luddy names." Wendy demanded in an angry tone. Ludwig could feel his face go red; Wendy couldn't have used the name 'Luddy' at a more inappropriate time.

"Oooh, Luddy." Elliot sneered, "What are you, boyfriend and girlfriend?"

"No! He's my-" Ludwig held up a hand to Wendy, and she quietened down.

"Let me handle this." he said in a firm voice that sounded borderline aggressive.

"Look out guys," Elliot said in a sarcastic drawl, "Luddy is angry with us!"

Ludwig could feel himself grinding his teeth. 'Toothwig' was beginning to sound like a better insult, at least it didn't belittle him like 'Luddy' did. Rage was beginning to overtake him, just like it had the day the piranha plant had attacked Wendy, only this time it was more intense.

Calm thoughts, think calm thoughts, he willed himself. Gradually, he could feel the heat that had spread through his body dissipate, he took a deep breath and tuned back into what was happening around him. He was surprised to see that Elliot was now right in front of him, and out of the corner of his eye, he saw Roy jump up and brace himself to charge at Elliot. It would take only a slight wrong move to begin a fight, so Ludwig stood stock still.

Elliot smirked at him, and there was something behind it that made Ludwig's stomach plummet.

"Do they know?" he asked slyly.

"Know? About vhat?" Ludwig was practically forcing the words out of his mouth at this point.

Elliot leant in as close as he dared get to Ludwig's ear without causing Roy to attack and murmured "About the Dragon-Koopa stuff? Have you told them, or do I have to… let them know?" he said in a revoltingly saccharine tone.

Time seemed to slow down considerably after that and Ludwig could feel his heart hammering away. It thundered so violently it felt as if it would burst out of his chest. He tried desperately to regain his composure but his voice quivered when he spoke.

"V-Vhat are you going on about?"

Elliot narrowed his eyes, "I was watching you Ludwig, you tried to throw me off by pretending there was someone home but I waited…

and I'm glad I did. I can't tell you the pleasure it brought me to know that you're a freak… no, I think 'monster' would be a much better term."

Ludwig had to remind himself to keep on breathing as Elliot continued.

"Ordinary Koopas aren't a huge fan of Dragon ones, I wonder what will happen when everyone finds out? It'd be such a shame if your friends turned on you…" he looked at Ludwig with something like regret in his eyes. Ludwig tried to glare at him, but his efforts were futile.

"I just hope that, for your sake, no one ever finds out." A malicious grin spread across his face, "But if they did, what would you rather? Being burnt alive or having your head cut off?!" he laughed evilly as Ludwig staggered backwards. The pictures from the book he had read flashed across his mind and he felt like he was going to be sick.

He turned to look at Roy and Wendy, whose attention had been temporarily diverted by a couple of gang members who were throwing snide remarks at them. Wendy looked to be on the verge of tears and Roy looked like he was about to make the Koopa who had caused her to be like this severely regret it. He turned back just in time to hear Elliot say, "Because I know what I'd choose-"

Elliot lunged towards him, claws outstretched, "-Your head!" Ludwig shrieked in fear but just milliseconds before Elliot could reach him, a huge blue flash erupted from the sky, sending both Koopas flying backwards. Ludwig slammed into the ground, his shell protecting him from severe damage but the force with which he landed knocked the air out of his lungs. All around him, he could hear voices. Teachers yelling at students to move out of the way, children screaming and, although it felt like he were underwater, so muffled were the voices, Ludwig could just about make out the sound of Roy's voice: "It's gonna be ok Lutz – I'm sorry for how I acted. His voice was rushed and anxious and when Ludwig felt himself being lifted off the ground by him, the last thing he heard before his consciousness gave out was a last desperate plea from Roy, his voice breaking: "Please be ok Lutz… please…."

Author's Notes:

This chapter turned out a lot shorter than I was expecting. I am not overly pleased with it, but I have tried my best to work on character dialogue. I struggle with writers block every now and then but I have found a cure for it: music. Music is a really good way of expressing yourself through writing, I have found. So, in a way, the whole reason this chapter is ready now is due to the Hamilton soundtrack :)

I have a few people I would like to thank. Thank you (as always) to StarlitDuck and Amethyst Goldenwind for your kind reviews, I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your support. Thank you also to GeistK97 for following the story.

Lastly, a big thank you to RichMountain112 for creating a TV Tropes page for this story, that was immensely kind of you and I am incredibly grateful.

Thank you so much to everyone who has stuck by Ludwig so far, see you next time!

Confession

Chapter Seven

Ludwig opened his eyes and groaned. The sunlight filtering into his bedroom that was generally so soft felt harsh nd painful to his eyes. He squinted through the pain and glanced at his alarm clock; it was 2:20pm. He had lost consciousness at around… he scratched his head as he shifted groggily so he was sitting upright… he was knocked out at morning break so that would be around… he used his claws to count out the hours, feeling too pained and weak to attempt mental maths. Half ten, he had been out for nearly four hours. He was thankful to still be in one piece, as the lightning blast had been so powerful it felt as if it would have torn him in half. As he gradually woke up, he became more aware of his surroundings and, particularly, the voices coming from downstairs.

"I can't Verne, it'll break him."

"I don't care! You need to tell him *now* or else it could happen again!"

"He'll think that he's some kind of threat!"

"Well he'll become one soon enough if you don't tell him! At least he'll be able to try and control it more!"

"Control it?! Verne, he's *nine* ! What kind of control can a nine-year-old have over something like this!"

It was his mother and Verne, having what sounded like a blowout argument downstairs in the kitchen. Ludwig debated whether it would be a particularly good idea to interrupt them. His mother sounded upset and Verne sounded angry, but angry about what. What had happened whilst he had been unconscious, and how did it relate to him?

So many questions swarmed around in his thoughts, and that made his headache all the more unbearable. It hurt so much that, as he

moved to get up, he knocked over the picture of himself and his father, and it crashed ear-splittingly on the wood planked floor.

The arguing downstairs ceased almost immediately and Ludwig could hear footsteps thundering towards him. Within seconds, Edith was in his room, her arms wrapping around him tightly in a fiercely protective embrace. Ludwig could hear her sobs as she gripped him, and he stroked her hair lightly with his small ivory claws.

"Oh Luddy … I v-vas so v-vorried about you … you poor, poor thing … you must've been so scared … what kind of a mother am I? Vhy didn't I tell you earlier…"

Ludwig was understandably confused by this outpouring of emotion. What on earth was his mother going on about? What did she wish she'd have told him? Maybe it was to do with the pain in his head, maybe it was his mother's tears, but Ludwig could feel himself on the verge of crying as well, and there was no holding back this time. He knew that, whilst they were together like this, that he should be honest. It was time to tell his mother about the fact that he was a Dragon-Koopa, but he was so frightened. Would she still love him, or would she push him away once she learned about the monster that he had found himself out to be? Was Elliot right about that? Did Koopas really hate Dragon-Koopas so much? He could feel the big, wet tears trickling down his cheeks and snout.

"I'm sorry too mother … I've told you a terrible terrible lie and I wish I hadn't … I really do." He choked slightly, "The truth is … v-vhen I asked you about Dragon-K-Koopas, i-it vasn't because someone had been talking about them … i-it's because …" he took a deep, shuddering breath, forcing the words: "It's because I am one!" out of his mouth.

Silence fell. Everything was quiet. It was only now that Ludwig noticed Verne standing in the doorway of his room, a shocked expression on his face. Oh God, why hadn't he checked to see who else was listening?! Now Verne, the mayor, knew his dirty little secret as well. He could feel the panic rising and subsequently broke down into more sobs. He didn't realise that Edith had ceased with her tears as she stood up. He only felt her move off of the bed and assumed that it was because she was repulsed by the fact that she

was sitting next to a monster.

"Oh mother … y-you must hate me … how can you ever look at me the same way again … your son … the monster…" he blundered on.

Edith was not particularly thrilled by this display. Having Ludwig so upset about being a Dragon-Koopa was the last thing she needed, especially given how much more she still had to tell him. If he was so upset about this, then heaven knows how he would react to what was to come. There was only one thing she could do that would stop his tears, she just wished that Verne were not around to see it. But what could she do? If Verne truly loved her, he would still accept her after seeing what she was about to do…

She stood back, took a deep breath, and shot a fireball into the fireplace at the end of Ludwig's bed, setting alight the coals that had been neatly stacked inside it for the coming winter.

She was correct in her assumptions. Ludwig ceased crying immediately and gawked at the fireplace, then at his mother and then at Verne, whose expression mirrored his own.

"Did you just – you're a – a – you're the same as me?!" Ludwig exclaimed. His shocked expression was quick to darken, however, as Edith accepted it would. "Vhy didn't you tell me?! Do you have any idea how terrified I've been?! How I've tried hiding it from everyone?!"

Edith sighed, "I owe both of you an apology." She gestured to Verne, who shook his head.

"It's fine." He said, ever the gentleman, "I understand why you may have wanted to keep that, er, *watered down* , shall we say?"

She looked back at her semi-glaring, semi-inquisitive son, "Vas dad one as vell?" he demanded.

"No, he vas not." She admitted, "It vas just me."

"And did he ever find out about it?"

"Yes. He found out about it almost as soon as we began dating. I'll

tell you the whole story now, to answer any of your questions Ludwig. It was terrible of me to keep it a secret for so long, but you have to promise me that you vill not interrupt me, otherwise I may find it difficult to continue." Edith looked towards Verne, who seemed uncertain as to whether he should stay or leave. "I know that this isn't completely vhat ve agreed to discuss, Verne. It diverges from the other things and you do not have to stay for this part if you do not vish to but just know that you are velcome to listen in. It may answer some of your questions as vell."

"It's alright. I'll stay." Verne took a seat next to the fire and stared attentively at Edith, Ludwig did the same.

"I von't interrupt you, mother. I just can't believe that you vouldn't tell me about something like this." Ludwig murmured, a lick of disappointment present in his tone of voice.

"Vell, I'm sure that once you hear my side of the story you vill understand vhy I vanted to keep it from you." Edith replied. Deep down, she felt terrible, and the disappointment in her own son's voice only made her feel worse. Nevertheless, she soldiered on.

"I vill give a brief overview on the history of Dragon-Koopas for the benefit of Verne. I am sure that you vill be informed on the subject, Ludwig, as I am aware that you have been reading the book about them that was in the library. I am only assuming this as I misplaced it one evening and have been unable to find it since."

Ludwig hung his head, guilty as charged. "Yes, I've been reading it." He mumbled.

"You don't need to apologise. It is my fault for leaving it out in the first place. I vas just concerned some of the things that vere in the book may have been, unsuitable. I vould imagine that is vhat upset you the most, is it not?"

He gave a small nod in response.

"Vell, it's not like that now. Don't listen to anyone who tries to tell you otherwise. Koopas and Dragon-Koopas have recently forged an alliance, so you need not fear the prejudice, but it is still wise to not

be too open about your abilities, as Koopas are still prone to jealousy…" she peered at Verne, "No offence."

He waved his hand, dismissing the statement.

"Alvright. As I said, for Verne's benefit, I vill give a brief overview on the history of Dragon-Koopas." Edith explained, launching into the story before Ludwig could ask any more questions. "Dragon-Koopas are considered a fairly modern species having only existed, to everyone's knowledge, for around five hundred years. You have most likely been acquainted with us before through fairy tales, but of course you are now aware that ve are far more than fictional beings." She paused just long enough for Verne to give a nod of his head before shooting back into her tale.

"The father of our species, the one who started our entire race, began as an ordinary Koopa. His name was Magma."

If Verne had been doubting his knowledge of well-known Dragon-Koopas, he did so no longer as a spark of recognition flashed across his face. Most Koopas knew of Magma, but hardly any knew his proper story. Verne was one of the few that was about to become acquainted with it.

"Magma had long been fascinated by fire, he loved everything about it from the colours, to the heat to its forever shifting shape. He always vanted to be close to it, which is odd considering that Koopas are cold blooded. He led a rather quiet early life as a result of this, as most other Koopas couldn't stand the thought of being near such a potent source of heat so often. But, as time went by and Magma aged, his desires shifted. He didn't just want to be near fire anymore… he wanted to *be* fire. This is vhen he began to hone his attention onto the Fire Flower, a rather well-known flower that is used as a power up by several species. Over the course of a few months he dedicated himself, heart and soul, into researching this plant and its properties. Koopas cannot use Fire Flowers as power ups and Magma's attempts to do so left him with severe internal burns. He was perplexed by this, as humans could use the Fire Flower for a plethora of different reasons. Magma did look into all of the known ways in which humans could use the Fire Flower, but what really caught his attention was not the humans ability to use

Fire Flowers, but the Yoshi's. Vhen a Yoshi ingests a Fire Flower, they can breathe fire. Magma threw himself into studying the Yoshis and comparing them to Koopas with the following question in mind: Vhy can Yoshis breathe fire and Koopas cannot? He studied everything from genetics, chemical structure, skeletal structures and different compounds in the bloodstream, but he could never find anything of significance. After trying and failing on multiple occasions, Magma decided to try a different approach, his desire to become this coveted element ever growing. He resorted to experimenting on himself on a regular basis. None of these experiments vorked and, in the end, they probably did more harm than good, but, undeterred, he continued with them nevertheless. I vould be hard pushed to recount all of these experiments, but a few that come to mind involved him isolating strands of the Fire Flower's DNA and injecting them into his bloodstream – that set his veins alight and he felt like he vas burning for days. On another occasion he tried drinking a mixture of Fire Flower that had been crushed with the petals of an Ice Flower – that made him feel like he had a fever. One more failed experiment, if I can recall it correctly, was inhaling the pollen of the flower – that got him hospitalised for a month, but even that did not stop him. I vould imagine that, after eighteen months of failure after failure, hospital admission after hospital admission, Magma was beginning to feel disheartened. Even if this was indeed the case, it by no means meant that his passion had been quelled."

Edith cut off again in order to ensure Verne was still with her. Ludwig, whilst he had read the book already, also only knew the basic outline of Magma's story and was only learning all of the intricacies of his life now, Edith could tell by the way he stared intently not at her, but past her. This was what told her she had his full, rapt attention and it was one of Ludwig's many quirks. If he were truly interested in your discussion, he would look past you, not at you, his mind engaged in stringing together the information that was given to him in order to form a picture and from that, develop questions. Questions were certainly forming in his mind now, as his brow furrowed. Edith speedily picked up where she left off, determined to finish Magma's story before she had to answer any of these questions, even though it prolonged her guilt.

"I vill now diverge into the tale that most Koopas are told when they are young, in order to tie events together, as this tale does contain a large amount of what I can decipher to be the truth. Both of you vill have heard of the tale "Firestar", I am sure? That is vhere Magma appears."

Verne and Ludwig both knew this tale well, judging by the looks on their faces.

Ah, Verne thought to himself, *that* was where he had heard the name Magma.

Edith gave a small smile at the memories of laying in bed next to Ludwig when he was younger, Johann at her side, reading the tale to him as he gazed at the illustrations in awe… she shook off the trance, the happy memories that came with it, aware that the recipients of her speech were still there next to her.

"You vill recollect that, in this story, Magma is present and you are given a vhimsical account of how he became the 'father of Dragon-Koopas.' I refer to this as it is the only source I have ever been able to find that appears to be reliable, having been penned by one of his own children after 'The Cull'. Legend has it that, plagued by his failed experiments and injured beyond belief from them with his family and few friends growing ever more distant, Magma resorted to going outside on a clear evening during a new moon. According to folklore, the Gods are able to listen to us during a new moon. Once outside, he begged the ageless Goddess of the Stars for help in his endeavours. Listening to this young Koopas grief, the Goddess was so moved that she sent a Power Star down to Magma's home and, once arriving, it landed on his last remaining Fire Flower. In the time that this took to happen, Magma had climbed into bed and cried himself to sleep. Once the Star mixed with the flower, it produced a strong golden light that roused him, thinking dawn had risen. He soon realised the glowing plant on the windowsill and was stunned, awestruck even, that the Goddess had heard his prayers. Looking out of the vindow, he thanked Her graciously as the stars began to fade in the purple light of the dawn. Vith not a moment to vaste, for stars cannot survive long out of the skies, Magma consumed the flower from petal to stalk. The effects were instantaneous. A golden glow overtook him. Warmth, fire,

spreading through his veins, through every fibre of his being. This Fire-Flower-Power-Star combination altered his anatomy completely, inside his chest cavity was now a newly awakened flame and his saliva now contained a natural fire retardant that would prevent him from burning himself whenever he tried fire-breathing. The power from the – I can't keep calling it Fire-Flower-Power-Star, the 'Firestar', let us say, took away all of the self-inflicted pain from his failed experiments, leaving only their scars as a testament to his sufferings in pursuit of success. Magma had finally become a part of the element he so craved, and that is how most Koopas believe our race began. Of course, Magma was the first documented Dragon-Koopa, as he was quick to share his newfound abilities with the vorld. I suppose vhilst I am on the subject of alterations, Ludwig, it vould be vorth saying that Magma became varm-blooded once he consumed the Firestar, so now you vill be able to understand vhy you have always felt the cold more than your peers." She forced a smile at her son, who made no move to reciprocate it. She moved on quickly: "Alvright, I'll make this next part as brief as possible, for it is not pleasant to dwell on this next topic of discussion. I myself do not vish to venture that far into it, but on this occasion, I really do not have much of a choice."

Ludwig swallowed uncomfortably, knowing all too well what was about to come, doing his best to steel himself against it.

"Magma vent on to establish the first monarchy of the Koopas. Beforehand, our species had never had a one true leader. He founded the great Koopa Kingdom, vhich is still around almost five-hundred years later and is beginning to once again show promise, the new King, Bowser, has been working flat out for years to rebuild it, as it had developed into something of a slum, I vill link back to this shortly, as Magma's story ties into this as vell. As I said, Magma became the first King of the Koopas, he was a ruthless leader, but a just one too. All historical evidence points to him trying to use his abilities for good and within months of him establishing himself as King, Koopas, a terribly oppressed species, vere thriving under his leadership. He soon married and his wife bore him four children, two sons and two daughters. Of these four, the three youngest were Dragon-Koopas. The eldest, Merinus, did not inherit his father's abilities and he vas most displeased by this. You see, just before he

vas born, his father had passed a law which stated that only Dragon-Koopas could have access to the throne, unless a monarch had no such offspring. Magma vas equally disappointed that his first-born lacked the fire-breathing abilities that he exhibited, but it could not be helped and he stood by vhat he had said. Therefore, he second-eldest, Danicus, vould be the rightful heir to the throne. As soon as he heard about this, Merinus turned all the resentment he felt towards his father onto his sister. He vas absolutely certain that the throne should belong to him due to his being the eldest. Unfortunately, this hatred towards his relatives quickly became more of a hatred towards Dragon-Koopas as a species, something that Magma vould later dearly regret. Merinus became more and more violent vith every passing day, but the last straw vas vhen he tried to arrange for an "accident" to occur vhen his siblings were out on a hunting trip, deciding that the only vay for him to acquire his goal of becoming king vas to dispose of the three Koopas that vere in his vay. Fortunately, Magma vas made avare of these plans by a servant and Merinus was banished from the Koopa Kingdom vith strict orders never to return. Vhen I said Magma vas ruthless, I meant it and Merinus returned at the risk of losing his head, but for the next twenty years, no one heard a thing from him." Edith stared at Ludwig, lost deep in the story, the gears in his head grinding, already expecting the worst.

"During these twenty years, Danicus and her younger siblings, Aerius and Alena vent on to have children of their own and the two eldest of these children, Aerius' son Dyma and Danicus' daughter Vernera also had children. Dragon-Koopas vere a slow growing species then and remain so to this day. Anyhow, the royal family was thriving, Magma was by now vell into his sixties and had two great grandchildren, life could not have been better for him after living almost the first twenty years in a kind of lonely obscureness. Unfortunately for Magma, everything vas on the brink of unravelling, as one day a most unvelcome visitor arrived in his court. His name vas Attilicus and he declared himself to be the son of Merinus. Of course, he vas as velcome there as his father vould have been and Magma had him put away in the dungeons, but not before he had heard this youngsters tale. It turned out that after being banished, Merinus had turned a small group of Koopas against their dragon counterparts and they had formed a kind of rebellion underground.

This group began to grow over the twenty years until they numbered nearly a thousand. The aim of this group vas solely to dispose of this new race of Koopas, who they felt vere most unvelcome, despite all of the vonders Magma had achieved during his reign, they felt as if things vere better beforehand. Attilicus varned Magma against throwing him in the dungeons, but Magma simply laughed off anything and everything he had to say, stating that he had more guards, more Koopas, on his side than Merinus and Attilicus vould ever have on theirs and left him to his own devices. As you can probably detect, that vas the vorst possible decision Magma could have made, as vith these kinds of visitors, there is alvays a part of the story that they von't tell you, in order to play the upper hand. Merinus had decided vhen he found out that he vas going to be a father that this child vould become a weapon against his *own* father." She grimaced slightly, although she had been retelling herself the tale for years in order to memorise it, the lengths which Merinus went to in order to ensure that his son would be a powerful magic wielder were still a horrible thought.

"In order to do this, he drew a summoning circle around Atticlicus' egg and recited a spell which summoned one of the most potent sources of magic in all of the worlds: shadow magic. This magic diffused itself into the veins of Attilicus, and his father had taught him how to use it and use it vell. Merinus knew full vell that vithout any magic his rebellion vould be fighting a losing battle. As soon as Attilicus entered the palace, all they had to do vas vait for the signal, which came in only minutes. As soon as his guards backs vere turned, Attilicus blew away the door to the cell and murdered them in the blink of an eye before setting off to velcome the group into the castle. Merinus had never loved Attilicus, seeing him only as a means to get vhat he coveted, but in that moment, vatching his son emerge from the castle drenched in blood, he felt a quiver of fatherly pride. The rebellion had to act quickly, as the alarm had already been raised and a search party vas now on the lookout for them, so they split up, some of the group vent vith Attilicus, but the majority accompanied Merinus, knowing full vell that Attilicus could kill hundreds vithout any assistance. In order to cut out a good deal, I vill simply say that the entire royal family, even with their fire powers, vere no match and vere all picked off, Attilicus killed them, I like to tell myself that they didn't suffer but I know for a fact that they vould

have done. Their heads vere mounted on spikes at the palace gates for all to see, and their bodies were burned in a huge bonfire, that vould have been Merinus's idea, I imagine he derived some sort of sick pleasure from watching the element that his father had loved so much consume his mangled corpse. Attilicus had disposed of everyone apart from Magma. He vas Merinus's kill. Vhat neither of them had bargained for, however, vere escapees."

Ludwig blinked suddenly, as if shaken out of a trance. *Escapees? Did he hear that right? In the book he had read that there were no such things!*

"Dyma, one of Magma's grandchildren, had the reputation for being vily and cunning. I am not sure how he managed to pull it off, no one is, but he escaped with Magma's two great-grandchildren and not even Attilicus could track them down with his shadow magic. They are obviously long dead now, but their vhereabouts have remained a mystery, and vill likely remain so forever. Meanvhile, as they made their escape, things vere turning ugly, very ugly, between Merinus and Attilicus. The former vas ready to ascend to power, the latter vas not happy to stand by and watch him do so, so he killed him, swiftly and unexpectedly. The rebellion group vas uncertain of vhat they should do, the sensible ones who cherished their lives bowed to him, the others charged, and he killed them as if killing a fly. It seemed as though Koopas were a doomed species at that moment, with a tyrant about to be coronated. This story has been long and strange, but it gets even stranger." Ludwig raised an eyebrow at that statement.

"Just before Attilicus could begin his reign of terror, a Magikoopa, no one knows his name, materialised behind him. He killed those bowing down to him, for who knows vhat they vould have tried to do if they vere allowed to valk free, and then they turned to Attilicus, who vas shocked at this most sudden happening and itching for a fight. I suspect that this Magikoopa, whoever they vere, vas a friend of Dymas. He had been known to visit a group of them and had allegedly been providing financial support to them, viewing their kind as friends and not enemies as the majority of the Koopa population did back then, but who knows? They could have simply been passing by at the time, but I doubt it. Attilicus, after fighting for a

vhile, vas caught off guard and hit by a very strong memory loss curse. He fell off a cliff and into a river. His body vas never recovered and he most likely drowned, unconscious Koopas don't make for great swimmers." She smiled warmly at both of them. "That turned into more of a monologue than a story, I do apologise. Does anyone have any questions they'd like to ask?"

The moment the words left her mouth Ludwig's hand shot up in the air. He had been silent long enough and had so many questions swarming around his mind at this point that his head felt as if it were on the brink of exploding, he didn't wait for his mother to ask, simply breezing through the first of many. "If I am to assume that the three escapees survived, then does that mean that you and I share our ancestral roots with royalty? And vhy did I not hear about the three of them escaping in that book? It said that all the members of the royal family vere killed."

"I'll answer that in two parts if I may, Ludwig. For starters, remember that I said Magma vas the first *documented* Dragon-Koopa, not necessarily the first ever. I am villing to believe that more stars have since fallen from the skies, Magma cannot have been the only one fascinated by fire, but, like I said, it is only yet another theory of mine. The only supporting evidence that I can provide is that Dragon-Koopas have spread across many of the worlds so we cannot all be descended from the original royal family, let alone our three escapees. I can feel it in my veins, Luddy, that we are not in any vay related to Magma. I know that is pretty veak evidence, but I just *know,* so I am sorry to disappoint." She had only just finished answering that question before Ludwig raised his hand again with another one, the one that she had most been hoping he would bring up.

"You seem awfully informed on the subject of our species. Of course, I would expect you to be, but you've told me a lot of things in far greater detail than the book", he produced the small leather book from underneath his pillow, where he had been storing it, "ever did. How do you know all of these intricacies? And vhere did you find this book?"

"I'm glad you asked me, I've been vanting to tell you since I knew you'd found it. Still, I am amazed you haven't figured it out by

yourself, the clues vhere there. This book vas vritten by your grandmother, Camille."

The moment she said it Ludwig felt like a complete idiot. Of course! C.V.K stood for Camille Von Koopa, and the handwriting! No wonder it had looked so familiar! He recognised it now from various postcards and notes that had been written to him when he was younger. His grandmother had died a couple of years ago, so he supposed he had pushed what her handwriting looked like to the back of his mind, after all, he wasn't expecting to be reading anything from her after that! He stared back at Edith with wonder in his eyes.

"I am glad you found the book though, Luddy. It is an important part of your heritage and I vas so vorried about having to explain it all. The reason I know all of the intricacies of this tale is because they vere passed down to me orally, in fact, they have been passed down countless generations by vord of mouth. My mother simply chose to vrite down the basic outline so that she vouldn't forget as she got older, her mind vas never solid. Everything you see in that book vas created by her, even the drawings. She vas a very skilled artist."

Ludwig grimaced, "A little too skilled if you ask me." He replied, remembering the headless Dragon-Koopas he had seen.

Edith laughed gently, "I agree vith you there, some of the drawings vere perhaps a little too gruesome for the book. Vhen she first brought it out for me to read I vas horrified. Although I vas vell into my teens before I found out about my ancestors, you are far too young to be learning about such dreadful things." she said in a remorseful tone, making Ludwig feel guilty for his coldness towards her. Yes, she had kept this important aspect of his life from him, but she was his mother and she only wanted what was best for him, didn't she? Surely if he were in her place, he would have done the same. He took a deep breath:

"I understand vhy you vould not vant to tell me about these things so early on in my life. I suppose that this conversation vould have been so much easier if I hadn't already discovered vhat I am, and…" she swallowed back a sob that was threatening to rack his body "and if dad vas still here. So I, too, must apologise, as I concealed the fact

that I knew until now, out of fear you would disown me. I'm sorry, mother." Ludwig said with a solemn voice that made Edith want to burst out laughing, he was such a serious little thing sometimes that it almost felt weird hearing the words come out of his mouth! She scolded herself, however, thinking of how terrified Ludwig must have been those past few weeks. More importantly, she mustn't laugh because that would make him hate her more when he learnt about the other secrets that she had been keeping from him, secrets far less forgivable. Those secrets were the reason tears were brimming in her eyes again.

"Oh, Luddy, you know that nothing in all of the world could ever make me hate you." she pulled him close to her, wrapping him in a fierce embrace for a moment, running her fingers through his mass of blue hair that was tangled as a result of his slumber. Ludwig nuzzled into her shoulder and she seized this opportunity to glance at Verne, who gave her a little nod, an encouraging expression on his face. He looked over at the young Koopa in her arms and spoke gently:

"Say, Ludwig?"

Ludwig pulled away and stared at Verne, having almost completely forgotten that he was in the room to begin with. "Yes?" he inquired.

"Do you happen to remember what happened before you became unconscious?"

Ludwig looked thoughtful for a moment.

"Vell… I vas vith Roy and Vendy during morning break… Roy vas in a bad mood and vas not speaking to either of us, vhen he is like that it is best to leave him to his own devices, but Vendy vas unaccustomed to this and vas trying to get him to talk to her… he looked like he vas getting agitated so I tried to call Vendy over to me but she just vouldn't listen… before I could intervene, Elliot came over to us – you know – Elliot Koopa. His family own that fancy hotel in Astrowatch… anyway, Elliot told me that he vas onto the Dragon-Koopa stuff. He asked me if I'd rather die by losing my head or being – being – burned alive." Ludwig gulped back the onslaught of nervous sobs, "Before I could do anything, he charged at me,

stretching out his arms… I'm not sure vhat he intended to do and I don't think I vant to know, but before he could reach me a – thunderbolt, I think it vas – hit the ground and threw me backwards – I could hear for a little bit, before everything vent dark – Vendy vas crying and there vere lots of Koopas screaming, most for Elliot, a couple for me – Roy picked me up and the last thing I remember hearing vas him begging me to stay alive, he thought I vas going to die, but I knew I vasn't – I just vish I could have told him that… after that, though, I'm drawing a blank."

Verne knelt down and took one of Edith's hands in his own. Ludwig could see that, whilst his attention had been trained on Verne, she had turned her head away from him, tears running in steady streams down her cheeks. When she opened her mouth to speak, her voice sounded raw.

"Ludwig, there is something else that I need to tell you. Something much more important than the Dragon-Koopa stuff. You need to know about it and I have vaited far too long to tell you, I should have told you as soon as your father – as soon as your father died, but it's been so difficult without him around, this vas a conversation that the two of us vere going to have vith you…" she tried to stop crying, but couldn't, she sounded broken. She knew that she couldn't let her tears stop her, and tried her best to continue, "It – concerns the night you vere born." She had to stop for a moment as a sob racked her body. Verne squeezed her hand gently, urging her to continue, they had already come so far, they could not afford to lose any more progress.

"On the night you hatched … the happiest night of my life and the happiest of your fathers, too … something incredible happened. Vhen ve heard your egg begin to crack, ve took it outside … it vas a beautiful evening, vith a crystal clear sky and an abundance of stars … ve vanted that to be the first thing you saw once you opened up your eyes for the first time … ve vanted you to remember sitting under that wonderful sky vith us … but just before you could poke your head out … it happened, something … monumental."

A queer shiver ran along Ludwig's spine. A sense of foreboding crept through his mind like some kind of evil shadow. There was something about the words his mother had said that sent chills

through him. He was uncertain whether he *wanted* to hear what she had to say, but felt for the time being that it was possibly better for him not to interrupt, Edith looked as though she were already in a significant amount of distress as it stood and he would not want to add to that. Instead, he waited patiently for her to speak, which frankly took a quite a long time owing to her tears.

"Your father got up to add some wood to the fire he had made and vhilst he did that, I hurried back inside to make us both a celebratory drink for your hatching. There vas a bright flash and I heard a terrible scream, so I ran back outside as fast as I could. Your father vas standing next to your egg, but there was something vrong … it vas glowing."

Ludwig looked at her, confusion etched onto his face. "Glowing?!" he half-stated-half-questioned.

Edith was struggling to regain her composure, so gave a curt nod instead of speaking. Ludwig started to feel impatient yet refused to push her, as it looked as though that would get him nowhere. After a couple of minutes, she spoke again in a somewhat slow and strained manner.

"It's crazy to think of something like that happening … the chances vere so slim as to be almost impossible. Ludwig … that night a Power Star fell from the sky and landed on your egg. In normal circumstances I don't know quite vhat vould have happened, but because you vere already a Dragon-Koopa, the stardust that entered the egg diffused into your bloodstream and it means that as vell as being able to breathe fire, you are also capable of vielding magic … *strong* magic."

"Vhat?!" Ludwig was incredulous. Even the idea of that happening seemed ridiculous. Something most peculiar was happening inside him, he felt angry, really angry, but could not tell why. "You're lying! There's no vay that could happen!" he yelled.

"I-I'm sorry Luddy, but i-it's the truth." Edith stammered, taken aback by this burst of outrage. Of course, she had known that he would be upset, but Ludwig usually wouldn't say anything and instead resume an air of coolness. For him to be shouting like this was very out of

character.

Verne tried to cut in. "Ludwig, I think you should-"

"You think I should what? You don't need to be here, this has nothing to do with you!" Ludwig spat, venom in his voice.

Edith felt horrified, "Ludwig, don't you dare speak to Verne like that!" she warned, but Ludwig was too far gone by now to really care. His eyes appeared to take on a blue glimmer, the stone on his necklace glowing so brightly that it was almost painful to look at. Something clicked in her mind and Edith lunged, ripping the necklace from Ludwig's neck and snatching it away from him. Almost immediately, his eyes stopped glowing, as did the stone, and he sunk back onto his bed, crying. He was terrified. Until now, Edith had almost forgotten about the necklace, and the warning that had been given to her when its owner had handed it over: *Remember, it is still a part of his wand and Ludwig won't be able to convert it until he has tapped into his full magical potential, so keep an eye on him. At the first sign of trouble, get it off him at all costs, don't wait, or something worse will happen.*

Edith put a hand on his shoulder and gently stroked his back, she didn't want him to speak before he was ready. Having made such a startling discovery, he was bound to be frightened. She herself felt helpless, what on earth could she say to make this better, what could she do? She hadn't been prepared to face this all alone, and she had still not told Ludwig about her newly formed relationship with Verne… how would he react to that. If he wasn't going to speak, she figured that there was no time like the present to make the announcement…

"Luddy, there is one more thing I would like to tell you, then you can rest." She told him gently.

"Vhat more can there possibly be to say, are you now going to tell me that there is some other thing vrong with me?!" he sobbed.

"No … this is different." She responded as Verne stood up. "Ludwig, I don't know if you have realised, having been so busy at school lately … but me and Verne … ve have been seeing each other a lot

as of late."

Ludwig sat up and wiped his eyes that were red and glazed from his tears. "Yes, I know. I am glad that you have such a good friend in him."

Edith was shocked by this. Given her son's high intelligence she would have expected him to have read between the lines at least a little, but Ludwig was not, she realised all of a sudden, particularly adept at seeing things in everyday life. This conversation was therefore going to be far more complicated than originally anticipated.

"No, Luddy, I don't think that you understand. Me and Verne are friends, very good friends … but over the last month we have become more than that."

"Best friends?" Ludwig questioned before putting two and two together. He adopted a look of contempt. "You mean that you and Verne are *dating?!"*

She sighed, "Yes. Me and Verne are dating."

Thus, a torrent of anger was released upon both herself and Verne, who tried his best to look relaxed but couldn't quite get the terrified expression on his face to shift.

"How could you do this to Vati? Vhat vould he think of you dating someone else?" Ludwig looked like he would burst into tears again. His father's death was like a scab on his mind. A scab that had just been picked clean, causing memories to inundate him. Verne scrambled around for something to say.

"Look, Ludwig. I am sorry that this has come as such a surprise to you. I understand how difficult things must be for you and I know that your father is irreplaceable. Let me tell you that I do not wish to be a replacement to him, I simply wish to be your friend." He smiled warmly and extended his hand towards Ludwig, who recoiled in anger.

"No, you may vish to be my friend, but let me wholeheartedly tell you

that I do not vant to be yours! How dare you come here and take my mother avay!" he shouted angrily, shaking with tears.

"Ludwig! How dare you speak to him that vay. I appreciate that this is difficult for you but I am allowed to move on! I love him! Apologise now!"

"No! *You* should be the one apologising to *me!* And give me back my necklace, Veronika gave it to me!"

Edith glared at her son. Her heart felt like it was breaking. She had never been spoken to in such a manner by him before and couldn't believe what she was hearing now. Was it so wrong to fall in love again, after having been through such a rough patch in her life? She felt her heart harden. *Yes* , this *was* the right thing to do, and Ludwig would have to learn how to behave himself, so she said, coolly:

"You know vhat, Ludwig? Until you apologise, I vill be keeping hold of this. I'm sorry but you must learn how to behave."

Ludwig took a deep breath and yelled, at the top of his lungs: "I hate you! I can't vait to get better and go back to school! It means I von't have to spend another moment vith either of you!"

Edith's face softened all of a sudden. "Oh Luddy … I am so, so sorry."

Ludwig glared at her. "For not telling me about my powers or for dating *him* ." He glared daggers at Verne, talking about him as if he were a thing and not a Koopa.

"Ludwig … You aren't going back to school." She said quietly.

"Vhat? Vhy the hell not!" Ludwig tacked on the profanity for good measure.

"Vhen you activated your powers and set of that bolt of lightning – I know you didn't mean it my darling, I know you didn't -" she quickly added as Ludwig tried to protest, "but it hit Elliot. He sustained a nasty injury and has been placed in intensive care at a hospital on the mainland."

Ludwig blanched at this statement. His stomach did a backflip and he could barely utter the words: "Is he going to die?"

"No, Luddy, he's going to survive … but his injuries, they are severe … there is extensive damage to his spine last I heard of. The doctors operating on him were saying that they doubted he'd ever walk again. Everyone at the school believes that the lightning vas a freak accident, and I'd like it to stay that vay for your sake. I vill teach you here, at home, as your powers vill become stronger once you reach puberty."

Ludwig felt as if the world was spinning around him. *Why had this happened now?* He asked himself. *Why did he have to lumbered with these terrible powers? He despised Elliot, that was true, but he wouldn't wish what had happened to him upon even his greatest enemy.*

"I'm sorry Ludwig." Edith whispered.

Ludwig stared at her, but his gaze was far away, as if he was no longer there with her.

"Me too."

Everything was silent for a while. Time seemed to stand still. Edith and Ludwig looked like they were about to go into full-blown hysterics, one from anguish and the other from pure, undulated terror, Verne stood in their midst, unsure of what action should be taken. Luckily, a knock at the door gave Edith the opportunity to leave the room, which she did so gladly, wiping her eyes as she dashed off.

Ludwig turned to Verne, quivering with rage. "I'll never forgive you. Do you hear me? *Never.* Now get out of my room!"

Verne did not mind the rudeness so much. He tried to put himself into Ludwig's shoes (something he was used to doing with island residents as mayor) and accepted that things must be incredibly difficult for him. What he did mind was the pure, undulated hate that was being directed his way. Ludwig had always seemed like an amicable fellow, and he had expected that he would have been a bit

more open-minded and kinder. He knew that Ludwig just needed time and space, that he would give him happily. He nodded curtly and exited the room.

As soon as Verne had left, Ludwig buried himself under his covers and began crying properly, wishing for all the world that he was anywhere other than where he was now. How could he have told his mother that he hated her? What a terrible son he was being! Still, how could she begin another relationship so soon? The death of his father was still fresh on Ludwig's mind, but was that only because he had been there when he drowned? Or did his mother not love his father at all to begin with?

As these questions buzzed around him like insects, Ludwig barely noticed the weak knock at his bedroom door, or, if he did, he ignored it. The knock came again, louder this time.

"Go avay!" he croaked, not wishing to see anyone at that moment. He heard the door open and repeated, "Go avay! I vant to be alone."

His mind was swayed when he heard a small female voice pipe up, saying: "Luddy? I know you're in there!"

There was a rustling as Wendy climbed under the covers and shuffled over to Ludwig, wrapping him closely into a hug. Ludwig was shocked to see his friends here, how were they here now? School didn't finish for another half an hour!

"Oi, budge over would ya!" Roy asked, also climbing under the covers, he snuggled up on the other side of the bed, so Ludwig was sandwiched between them. He couldn't hold back crying in front of them anymore and sobbed heartily.

"It's okay, Lutz, get it all out." Roy whispered, holding him close. Ludwig could hear Wendy crying.

"I thought you died, Ludwig! You were really still for a moment and … and I thought you died!" she wailed.

Ludwig stroked her cheek lightly with his claws. "It's okay, I'm alive, aren't I? I vasn't going to let a little lightning bolt be the end of me."

He tried his best to smile at her, but he felt exhausted. Having not experienced such strong emotions before had left him feeling almost completely drained.

"Don't worry about the whole not going back to school thing, Lutz. Me and Wendy have you covered."

"Vait, how do you know about that?" Ludwig asked, shocked that Roy could have known about the previous occurrence.

Roy could hear footsteps approaching the room they were in. "That don't matter right now, Lutz, but what does matter is that we'll be joining you. Me and Wendy left school today too."

"How?" Ludwig asked incredulously.

"You want the nice version?"

"Not really, everything my mother has just told me has been sugar-coated enough."

"Alright then, I dragged a desk outside, set it on fire and punched a teacher that tried to stop me."

Ludwig gave a small nod, "I can see that happening."

"I told Elliot's sister that her brother was a lousy excuse for a Koopa and that he deserved everything he got." Wendy grinned. "Me and Roy grabbed our things and just walked out the gate. No one tried to stop us."

"Vendy! That vas a terrible thing to say!" Ludwig scolded.

"Why, it's true isn't it? Well, maybe he didn't deserve to lose his ability to walk but … I'm sorry, Luddy, you don't want to be hearing anything more about that. Don't worry, how we know about that is also a story for another time." She said. Ludwig looked baffled for a moment, then he gave a small smile.

"I though you'd both hate me for not telling you. Who in their right mind vould vant to be friends vith a Dragon-Koopa … vith a freak?"

"Don't be an idiot, Lutz, we couldn't give a damn whether you were one or not. It's not exactly changed who you are, has it?"

Ludwig would normally have told him off for using 'damn' around Wendy, even if it was a mild word in comparison to his armada like barrage of other words, but this time he let it slide. Right now, cuddled up with his friends, he couldn't care about anything else in the world.

Author's Notes: Wow, another chapter done and dusted! I apologise for the long wait, this was initially supposed to be published on Halloween but I have had a lot on and have therefore not had time to write a lot. Things were not helped by the complexity of this chapter either, as I decided to go into the 'birth' of Dragon-Koopas and I wanted the origin story to be sound, so thank you for bearing with me!

I have noticed a few questions about the stone on Ludwig's necklace. I won't reveal what it is outright, but if you re-read the fight scene in chapter one and then skip forward to Ludwig receiving the necklace itself, things should make more sense. I don't think it is always clear when reading it the first time.

A big thank you to CobaltWizard, StarlitDuck, Amethyst Goldenwind and RichMountain112 for your continuing support of this story, you guys are the best! I would also like to thank deandino92 for favouriting.

Finally, I have a couple of exciting announcements to make. Myself and one of my friends, CobaltWizard have officially started up a Tumblr page dedicated to the Koopalings. It is called SevenKoopaKids (it can also be found under the name 'The Seven Koopalings') but for some reason it will only show up when searched for on Tumblr itself so I am trying to work on that. We are also on Instagram under the same name. So far, we are both unused to social media but it has been fun so far. It's mostly just memes that we're posting at the moment but we hope to eventually get round to creating some headcanons as well!

Onto the second announcement. Over next summer, I am thinking of becoming a beta-reader. I wanted to say this now so that I have time to prepare. If you would like me to proof-read any stories or even just the odd chapter, please let me know so that I can plan in advance!

Well, that's it for now, stay safe everyone and I'll see you next time! :)

Michaelmas Notes

AN: Hi everyone, it's Diala. I apologise for the slow and erratic updates. The run up to Christmas, along with other things, has meant that I have not had quite the amount of time to write that I would have liked! I hope that you are all well and I would like to thank you for all of your support. I would also like to make you aware that the next update is going to be a little different. I was hesitant to post it, but I have decided I will, nevertheless. It is still a part of this story, but the style is different. This will be a one-off chapter, then the updates will return to their original format. I have put the author notes here as there will not be any in the next update.

On a side note, I have created accounts on both AO3 and Wattpad as I have recently had trouble with trolls on this site. I do not plan on ever leaving this site, I have created accounts here as well because these sites take trolls more seriously. I do not let these people get to me, in fact, I find them amusing, as their reviews make it clear that they have never so much as read any part of my story and each and every one of their reviews will be continued to be removed. I'm sorry, but can I ever take someone who hides behind their screen as a guest trying to make others feel bad seriously? I don't think so! :)

If all goes according to plan, I will have another chapter ready for Christmas. Until then, stay safe!

Chapter Eight

"Vhy did I agree to this again?" Ludwig inquired as he followed Roy and Wendy down a narrow and overgrown path that led into Kaleido Woods, just opposite the small settlement of Silverlake. It was what would have been first period at Pine Grove School, around eight in the morning. The three friends were now being home-schooled by Edith, who, as a reward for all their hard work was allowing them to take the morning off, although Ludwig knew full well that it was also because Verne would be going round. Why else would his friends

have been so insistent on getting him out of the house? As of now he simply refused to acknowledge Verne's existence which made it awkward for everyone involved. He probably could have left things there, but no, instead he had decided he would converse only in German, or not speak at all. Roy hoped that, for Ludwig's own sake, that he never found out that Verne spoke almost perfect German and could subsequently understand everything he was saying about him, and Ludwig had been saying some pretty nasty things, judging by the mortified expression on Edith's face. Who would have thought that one of the kindest, gentlest Koopas he had ever met could have such a vicious tongue?

The forest was a place of exquisite beauty at all times, but the morning air really added a little extra something. The mist from Sunset Waters, the lake where Johann had died, was located only a couple of miles away from where Ludwig was now and the mist that was suspended above its depths was creeping through the trees, creating a mauve haze that sparkled in the light of the low sun. Taking a deep breath, Ludwig could smell that gorgeous scent that pine trees emit filling his soul with an unmatched bliss so great that he very nearly forgot about his troubles altogether…

"Ludwig?" Roy's voice snapped Ludwig back into reality and he looked around. They had reached a little glade in the forest. Ludwig was transfixed, never before had he come across this place and he thought he knew almost every inch of the island! The clearing was carpeted in a lush, dewy grass and the sky overhead, through the mist, was a majestic blue. Ludwig let out a sigh, his breath appearing as a cloud before him.

Roy threw down the basket of food that he had been carrying, indicating that this was where they would be stopping for now. Ludwig went to go and sit down but was stopped.

"Hold up, Lutz, we gotta do some stuff first." Roy told him.

"Stuff? Vhat stuff?"

"Y'know… training." Roy uttered the last word hesitantly, aware that Ludwig would most likely become agitated once he inevitably discovered why they had made this trip. As guessed, Ludwig

narrowed his eyes.

"Training?" he asked.

Roy gulped as Wendy chirped in brightly with: "Luddy, will you show us your fire breath? Pretty please?" She looked up at him with wide eyes.

Ludwig glared at Roy, "Seriously?! You dragged me all the vay out here to try and get me to use my powers?!"

"Now, hang on a moment, Lutz, let's not get too carried away here, we only wanted to see you breathe fire-"

"'Only vanted to see me blow fire', bah! Ve could have stayed at my house if you vanted to see me do that! The fact that ve have come all the vay here to a very, *very* secluded spot suggests that you vanted me to do much more than that." Ludwig responded in an angry voice. Silence fell between the three of them, broken after a spell by Ludwig again, speaking in a much lower voice that was almost akin to a whisper. "You're trying to get me to use magic, aren't you?" The phrase, despite being spoken as a question was really more of a statement. Ludwig wasn't stupid, he knew now what they were up to. Both Roy and Wendy looked at the ground in shame.

"We're sorry, Luddy. We just thought that, if you tried using them with us around, then maybe you would realise that your powers aren't as dangerous as you think they are…"

"Dangerous? Vendy, they are more than dangerous. You saw vhat I did to Elliot, vhy in the stars vould you vant to put your own life in danger for me?"

She looked at him sadly, "Because you're our friend, Luddy. We love you."

Ludwig felt his anger ebb slightly at these words. It did not dissipate completely, but the thought of his friends doing this solely to make him feel better was a nice sentiment to dwell upon. Strictly speaking, his powers most certainly appeared to be connected to emotions, he

didn't know for sure but there was now a substantial amount of evidence that would tie his emotions to his magical abilities. When Elliot had charged at him, he had felt an intense wave of fear sweep over him, and that uncertainty had materialised as a bolt of lightning. Erratic, sudden, in the spur of the moment. Similarly, although not entirely magic related, adrenaline was what had led to the discovery of his ability to breath fire. In his spare time or, rather, whenever his mother was out (which was far less frequently now), Ludwig had been practising his fire-breathing and was actually proud of what he had accomplished. Yesterday, for example, he had managed to light a successful bonfire whilst standing fifteen metres away from the pile of fuel he had collected. His powers though… those he dared not try to use, even when no one was around. He wished desperately that he was on more pleasant terms with his mother, but alas he had pushed her away and, from his perspective, he didn't see any reason why she should forgive him. Still, she was not entirely blame free…

Ludwig turned his thoughts away from his mother for the time being, as when he thought of her, he thought of Verne, then he became angry, something that he couldn't risk as it was very possible his powers would get the better of him again. He couldn't let that happen, not now. He looked at them now, Wendy looked upset and Roy, Roy's face was unreadable. All of a sudden, Ludwig felt terribly guilty. Here were his friends trying to help him, and he had pushed them away too. Besides, he was pretty confident in his fire-breathing, so what were the odds of something going wrong? In addition to this, he didn't want to pass up an opportunity to show off his abilities. He was, after all, never one to pass up an opportunity to impress people.

"Look, I'm sorry I vas so harsh. Of course you can see my fire-breath, but that's it, okay? I have that side of my powers under control, I can't say that about the rest of my magic though, so please, don't ask to see that."

Wendy perked up at this. Roy moved but Ludwig was still unaware as to what was going on behind the sunglasses. Was he annoyed? Upset? When he responded, his tone was light, indicating that, for now, he was happy.

"Thanks, Lutz, an' don't worry 'bout anythin'. We're here to help you if anythin' goes wrong."

Ludwig grinned, "Who said anything about something going wrong?" he said, before darting off to gather some bracken to use for target practice.

It was coming up to ten when Verne arrived at the house. Edith received him joyfully and was in his arms the moment he had crossed the threshold of the house. With Ludwig out of the house, she could love Verne without guilt. Both of them took a seat in the library, the low sun shining on the tiles of the roofs of Astrowatch. Edith decided to initiate a conversation about Christmas, as the holidays were fast approaching. "I'm thinking of inviting Muak and Roy here for Christmas Day."

"I see." Verne's voice was much more distant than it usually was.

"You'll be coming too, won't you?"

He rubbed the back of his head, as though he were in some sort of pain. "That's the thing. Edith, Ludwig despises me. You *know* he despises me. I think that my being there on such a special holiday would only make him hate me more, but I don't mind him hating me, what I mind is him turning against yourself, which I fear has happened as of late. I guess, what I'm trying to say is… do we put our relationship on hold?"

An awful silence fell. Edith pulled her legs to her chest and buried her head in her knees. What was she supposed to say to that? Yes, Ludwig hated Verne and it didn't look like that was going to change anytime soon. But did Ludwig really hate her, his own mother, as well? She just couldn't see that happening. Was it really too soon for her to be beginning a new relationship? And did Ludwig not see how torn she was about the matter?

"I'm terribly sorry about the awful things Ludwig said last time you were here. I had no idea he could be so aggressive. I love you, Verne. Vith all my heart, I do. I want you to be there for Christmas. Let me speak to him tonight, just give me a day to try and work something out. I could not bear the thought of having to give you up.

I hope that I can make him understand that."

Verne smiled weakly, as though it were causing him a lot of trouble trying to find the energy. "I love you too, Edith. Don't feel you have to apologise for what he said, though. I just can't believe that he thinks my glasses are really that bad!" he said, slyly, a proper grin breaking out.

"Oh, don't!" Edith moaned into her knees. "That was an atrocious thing for him to have said!"

Verne pulled her onto his lap and held her close. "I'm only kidding! Don't you go worrying yourself about anything."

She rustled his rust-brown hair gently. "Things vill get better, I'm sure they vill. Just give me some time…"

Ludwig collapsed next to Wendy, who was clapping away. "Wow Luddy! That was really amazing!"

He had spent the last twenty minutes breathing fire, quite a bit longer than he was used to and the effort had all but wiped him out. Roy chucked him a cupcake out of the basket he had brought with him. Ludwig bit into it with relish. "This is vonderful, did you make it?"

Roy nodded. "Uh-huh, fresh this morning." He watched Ludwig devour the cake whole, studying his face intently. "You know, Lutz, Verne isn't a bad guy."

Ludwig nearly choked, "Can we not talk about him now? Please?!"

Roy almost gave in. *Almost.* "Ya know what? No. I need to talk to ya about 'im otherwise things are gonna get worse. Will ya just listen to me?"

Ludwig could see no point in arguing with Roy now. What if he went into another one of his sulks? It was becoming increasingly harder to pull him out of them now, to the point where it seemed as though one day, he would never come out of them. Ludwig had no idea what had caused the sudden change in his behaviour and did not want to push him on the matter, as that in itself would be a topic that

made him grumpy. "Alright." He relented, "You have five minutes."

Roy seemed happy enough with that. "Thank you. Look, I know the situation you're in right now sucks, believe me I do. But Verne ain't the bad guy, Lutz. I don't wanna be mean or anythin' but you've begun to antagonize him when, realistically, he ain't done anythin' wrong."

Ludwig was in half a mind to get up and leave it at that, but he couldn't. He had made a promise.

"Verne don't want to see ya upset. In fact, quite the opposite. The whole reason we were able to leave school and do home-schooling with you was because of him."

"What?!" Ludwig spoke, incredulously. Roy looked him in the eyes.

"He spoke to both our parents. Don't worry, he didn't give them the real reason and neither did we. He knew how upset you were gonna be, so he told us to cause a scene at school, knowing that we wouldn't get into trouble if our parents were informed. He ain't *tryin'* to replace your dad, Lutz. He just wants to make you happy. More importantly, your mom loves him, don't you see that? How you've been acting is tearing her apart. She loves you and she adored your dad, but do ya not think she should be allowed to move on, to ease her pain?" He stopped talking, "Well, that's my five minutes. We ain't gotta say anythin' more on the subject." He turned to Wendy and asked her a question, but Ludwig didn't hear what it was. He had become overwhelmed by a sudden wave of remorse and guilt. What had he been thinking? How could he have been so hateful? He hadn't even apologised to his mother for the dreadful things he had said to her that day he lost control of his powers. And Verne. He'd really wanted to help him all along? Oh, what had he done?!

As his friends chatted together, a solution presented itself. Ludwig didn't like it, but it was his only option. He stood up. "Please excuse me, I have something I need to do. Go back without me. I shan't be too long."

A look of understanding passed between himself and Roy. Wendy didn't understand and called after him as he turned and pelted

through the glade, down the path, and out of the forest. His destination: Astrowatch.

Verne sat slumped in his armchair next an enormous pile of paperwork, bored out of his mind but at the same time anxious to finish with it. When there was a knock at the door, he was in half a mind to just ignore it, but it soon became frantic, so he figured whatever it was couldn't wait. He swore on all that was good and holy that if it was another resident complaining about a missing Cheep-Cheep, he was going to lose his mind. You can imagine, therefore, the shock he felt upon seeing Ludwig standing on the porch, doubled over and gasping for breath. Verne was speechless, what was he doing here?

"Er, Ludwig? Would you like to come in? It's too cold for you to stay outside."

Ludwig managed to stand up. Being unused to exercise he was at one point almost certain that his run would kill him. He looked at Verne, wonder dancing in his grey eyes.

"Vhy have you been so kind to me?" he asked.

Verne looked taken aback. "Why, it's because I care about you Ludwig. I do my best to be nice to everyone!"

Ludwig felt a lump form in his throat. Why was he being so emotional? It seemed as though he had become a wreck ever since the day Johann died. The smallest niceties could set him off, as they were about to now…

"Ludwig, I think you should come indoors. Come and sit with me in the parlour and let yourself get warm. Then we can talk." Verne pushed open the door and Ludwig walked nervously in, clasping his small hands together in anxious anticipation. Once in the parlour, Verne ordered Ludwig to take a seat on the sofa near the fireplace, fumbling around for some matches as he did so.

"Oh, I can help you vith that." Ludwig jumped back up and stood a little ways back from the fireplace. Mustering as much concentration as possible, he took a deep breath and before Verne could stop him,

shot a fireball into it, igniting the neatly stacked logs and kindling. He looked back at Verne who was holding his hands out in front of him, face white, clearly expecting the worst to happen.

"Sorry, Ludwig. I'm not too used to, well, *that.* " He gave an uneasy laugh, which didn't make Ludwig feel any better at all. Verne was nervous not of his powers but because of Ludwig himself, and for that Ludwig felt atrocious.

"Now, what was it you wanted to say?" Verne attempted to move the conversation forward, no doubt eager to get it over with. Ludwig hung his head in shame.

"I came here to see you because I have been treating you abhorrently. There vas absolutely no excuse for my behaviour and I am deeply, deeply sorry. I do not hold it against you if you choose not to forgive me, I wouldn't forgive myself for my behaviour." He could feel the tears of anxiety burning in his eyes. "I have to go… they're expecting me back at home." He turned to go but Verne caught his arm.

"No, Ludwig, I would like you to stay here for a moment longer if that's alright. I would like to talk with you." He gave a reassuring smile, kindness glowing like embers in his eyes. "Don't worry, I won't keep you long. Would you like a drink? I have cocoa powder in the kitchen, how about a hot chocolate?"

Ludwig's anxious expression did not change. He must not stay long, for his friends could only cover for him for so long, before his mother became suspicious. "Yes please." he replied, a tad apprehensively.

Verne disappeared into the kitchen and emerged a few moments later carrying a small tray laden with drinks and biscuits. He handed a mug to Ludwig, who held it carefully, relishing the warmth it provided his small hands. Verne took a seat next to him, placing the large plate of biscuits between them. Looking at them, Ludwig noticed the lebkuchen, one of his favourite winter treats.

"How are your studies going?" Verne asked, holding the plate out towards Ludwig.

"Not too bad. It is very strange studying in our house, though. Apart from the teachers I do not miss school. I am hopeful that I shall be allowed to go to university in the next year or so, but I am undecided on vhat it is I vant to study, or vhere I vant to go. I vould simply love to attend Toadstool University in the Mushroom Kingdom, but they do not care for our kind, so I have been looking into Frankenstein University as they specialise in the sciences. I think I vill study a few subjects, namely Advanced Magical Science, Engineering and Advanced Mathematics." Ludwig replied, helping himself to the lebkuchen.

"Goodness, you're certainly well prepared! Wherever you choose to go, my boy, the university should be overjoyed to have you."

Ludwig blushed, embarrassed by the attention but appreciative of the praise. After a moment, Verne decided to cut to the chase:

"Ludwig. Why did you hate me so? You are under no pressure to tell me, I am simply curious."

"I… I'm so sorry, sir, I just… I…" Ludwig stifled a sob, "I just miss my vati… I miss him so much."

"Oh, Ludwig, you poor little thing!" Verne placed a hand on the small Koopas shoulder and gently rubbed his back, trying to ease his pain as he sobbed pitifully. "Johann was a dear friend of mine and I would do anything to bring him back to you and your mother. I can't bear to see the pain that has been inflicted upon both of you."

"V-vhy did he h-have to… to die though?! It isn't fair!" Ludwig cried. Verne pulled him into a hug and held him until his sobs abated. He had seen a fair amount of grief in his time, so consoling others came naturally to him. Ludwig stared at him with red eyes, his nose running. Verne dug out a handkerchief and handed it to him.

"Thank you." Ludwig croaked, "I don't hate you, sir. I just miss my dad. How has mother been able to move on, whilst I've been stuck in the past? We can't just forget him!"

"I think, Ludwig, that life can be rather unfair sometimes. We never find out why, things just happen for seemingly no reason at all.

Johann was a faultless individual and a remarkably kind Koopa. You remind me of him. We never fully recover from the death of someone we love, but we do learn to move on. In the case of your mother, I believe that she needs someone else to help her through the pain, which is what I have been trying to do. I love her, Ludwig, more than anything in the world. I cannot bear to think of how our relationship has hurt you. I do not wish, under any circumstances, to replace your father, for I could never amount to half of what he was. I simply want to make your mother happy. I want to make *you* happy. You are so young and great things lie ahead of you. I want to be there to see you achieve them. Do you understand that?"

Ludwig wiped his eyes and looked at the kind mayor. "Yes. I understand you, sir. I am so, so sorry for how I treated you. Can you ever forgive me?"

Verne smiled at him. "Of course I forgive you! And please, call me Verne."

Ludwig tried his best to smile back. "Thank you, Verne."

"Now hurry up and finish your drink. We need to get you back home!"

Ludwig wasted no time in devouring the lebkuchen and necking his hot chocolate. Verne saw him to the door. Before he left, Ludwig extended an invitation to dinner.

"Are you sure, Ludwig? I don't know if your mother would like to hold a dinner at such short notice."

"She won't mind, because I'll be doing the cooking!" Ludwig declared, despite knowing full that cooking was not his forte.

"Well, if you're sure. Shall I drop by at sixish?"

"Yes, that's a perfect time."

"Alright. Can I bring anything?"

Ludwig thought for a moment. "Could you bring some of that lebkuchen? It was really nice!"

Verne laughed, "Of course! I'll see you later."

Ludwig waved goodbye before legging it out of Astrowatch and back to his own home, where he arrived, incredibly flustered, fifteen minutes later. Edith was surprised that her son had run all the way from town but asked no questions. Ludwig waited until Roy and Wendy had left before he told her about anything that had happened.

"Vhat are you doing, Luddy?" she asked later that day as Ludwig darted to and fro gathering various items from cupboards in the kitchen.

"I'm making dinner for tonight. Verne is coming to see us; I went to see him earlier." He stopped and looked at her. She looked like she would faint. Had she heard that correctly? Ludwig had visited Verne *and* asked him for dinner?!

She opened her mouth to speak, but was silenced by Ludwig, who threw his arms around her waist. She could hear his muffled voice apologising over and over.

"Oh, Luddy! I'm sorry too, I have left you in the dark for far too long!" she swept him into her arms, taken aback at how much heavier he had become. Her little koopa was growing up right before her eyes. Before long, he would be off to study abroad! She must therefore make the most of every moment she had with him.

"Mother, I don't hate you! I don't and I'm sorry I ever said I did!" Ludwig buried his snout in her neck, his breath tickling her. She held him close to her, "I know, Luddy. I know."

AN Cont'd: Thank you to the wonderful StarlitDuck, Amethyst Goldenwind and RichMountain112 for reviewing, to Samantha Nuttly for reviewing, favouriting and following the story and to Hip Neptune for favouriting and following it. Your support is, as always, very much appreciated!

An Excerpt of Early Poetry: L von Koopa

AN: I'm so sorry about all of the lines in this chapter, Doc Manager wouldn't let me put in a blank line for some reason so I have had to use lines to separate the stanzas.

The Early Collected Poetry of Ludwig von Koopa, from *Shards of Self: A Memoir* by Nikolai V. Koopa.

Upon moving into the castle to live with His Royal Highness (H.R.H.) King Bowser Koopa, a new arc of life began for Ludwig. This new arc, however, was not easy to commence, as Ludwig soon discovered. He was regularly plagued by night terrors and suffered severe insomnia for several years, all linked to the horrific events of his past. Magic alone could not cure his deepest fears, nor even restrain them, but the young Ludwig soon happened to chance upon something that allowed him to simultaneously vent his emotions and take away some of the fear and hurt inflicted on him from his past troubles. Ludwig had discovered none other than the art of poetry. Attached below are some of his never-before-seen works that he composed between the ages of ten and twelve. Something that you will most likely notice about reading them is the rather depressing tone they exhibit. As mentioned previously, this was Ludwig's way of releasing all of the emotions that he had been holding back. He was reluctant to discuss almost anything of his past with me when we first met (of course, as anyone from either of our kingdoms will tell you, we are much better acquainted than that now!) A lot of information from Ludwig's past must, however, at his bequest, remain the past, so what you will read of it in this memoir is highly condensed. Therefore, we would like to invite you to feast your eyes upon some of Ludwig's early works. He has stated that they are not perfect and may contain errors but he would like you to see them nonetheless.

Dance of Death (Danse Macabre)

He sweeps in his

Black robes,

As though

Attending a ball.

This is, however, no ordinary ball,

For in it is a dance.

The Dance of Death,

Danse Macabre.

Death itself, has many dances.

Some, eager to avoid his fatal touch,

Choose to tango their way around him,

Whist others waltz

Peacefully.

Treating him not as a fearsome fiend,

But a welcome friend.

To what end?

If your time has come

Why seek you to remain

Here?

When you can return to his,

Your old lovers arms,

And leave the other

Here?

She stares death in the

Eye.

Acknowledging that her time has come,

Today the day she dies.

It will not be death,

At his hands, on his terms.

Oh no,

That she will most certainly see to.

To let him kill her,

Would be his victory,

Plain to see

Why she must do the wretched deed herself.

The fear is still there, that is true,

But why rue

This day?

It was always coming, after all.

She thinks of him.

Her son, on the run

From a fate worse than death

(He, of course, is clueless).

What will become

Of him?

And his friends,

What of them?

But there is no time now

To dwell upon these questions.

Not now, no,

Time is a fickle,

Fleeting thing.

The grim deed must be done

To score herself a final victory,

To one day give her son peace of mind.

She looks the devil before her in the eye,

He knows, he lunges, but he is too late.

The metal shard has already been plunged

Deep, deep, into her heart.

He scarcely had time

To bat an eye,

As she drifted from one plane of existence

To another.

Ich und du

No matter what I say,

No matter what I do,

It always comes back to you and I,

I and you,

Ich und du,

Ich und

Du.

Reflection

Looking into my mirror

one day, I was given quite the fright,

For standing there in front of me

was really quite the sight!

Gazing unto the glass,

I chanced to look upon his face,

And saw he was not I,

His eyes aflame, of me there was no trace.

His eyes were brown, mine are grey,

His hair was messy, mine is neat.

And looking down I saw great claws

Protruding from his feet.

He did not move,

I did not speak,

For what could I have said?

My mind was weak.

Then all of a sudden, a frenzy of motion,

My reflection's face filled with glee.

"King dad, come quick, come quick!" he chanted,

"Come quickly, come and see!"

A deafening roar came next,

That could have shaken the foundations of stone.

I drew myself back from my mirror, shaken,

Terrified, chilled to the bone.

The roar that I heard filled my heart

with fear,

So I leapt aside

To the mirrors rear.

I waited a heartbeat,

Maybe two,

Before I stepped back again

to see if they had gotten through…

But, to my amazement, they had gone,

The connection broken, perchance?

For a moment I could not believe what had happened

And stared at the mirror askance.

I dared not ask the king that night,

About the things I'd seen.

Besides, he was too busy (so he said),

Searching for a queen.

'That mirror must be taken away,'

I thought to myself that night.

'I cannot risk them coming back,

They gave me quite the fright!'

I did not, however,

Envisage what was to come.

What I can say is that my woes were far from over,

And soon all would come undone.

Searching

I was told you were always watching,

If so, where are you now?

Do you see all of this destruction,

Ageless goddess of the stars?

How many of us have fallen now?

How many still to come?

All these thoughts I think to myself,

As I wander down this unlit path.

If you are there, then why don't you

light my way?

It is so dark here, I feel I will trip and fall

over some unseen root.

If I can't see you

then how do I know that you are there?

She told me I should trust you,

But how do I know that I can?

It is not only myself I fear for, rather,

It is those I travel with.

They are so young,

So vulnerable.

I wonder…

Can you help give me the strength

required to protect them,

These small Koopas I love?

I regret so many things,

Words unspoken; things unseen.

I'm trying not to let them get to me,

But it is hard, I am so tired.

It's getting late, we must now

rest.

For tomorrow will surely mark

another struggle.

I ask of you,

I implore you,

Hear my thoughts,

Hear my prayers…

They are calling me,

I must leave you,

And so, for now,

So long, farewell, adieu.

AN: So originally I was trying to avoid having author's notes in this chapter, but judging from a couple of reviews, there is a clear issue that needs addressing. I have, in all of my time on this site, deleted two reviews. Both of these reviews were troll reviews and went along the lines of 'your writing sucks.' That isn't criticism, that's just mean. You are under no obligation to like my story, I write about things that interest me personally and if you aren't a fan of them, that's fine, there is just no need for something like that.

I would also like to extend an apology to the user *Everets* . I can't recall having ever received a guest review from you and I believe that is due to the site itself, as I have had a similar problem with my reviews not showing up on stories. Please be

assured I did not delete it, as I am open to constructive criticism. I am in the process of editing those paragraphs, as you are right, they are humongous!

I would never delete a review because it criticised my work as that would completely defeat the purpose of my joining this site. All reviews, both good and those that contain criticism, are greatly appreciated :)